

KEEPING THE BEAT: THE PRACTICE OF A BEAT MOVEMENT

A Dissertation

by

CHRISTOPHER RICHARD CARMONA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Keeping the Beat: The Practice of a Beat Movement. (August 2012)

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The literary movement of the Beat Generation continues to be a truly influential movement in our current society. From the popularization of hitchhiking across America to the rebel without a cause of James Dean, the Hippie movement of the 60s, and the explosion of poetry readings in coffee shops, the Beats have been influential to much of the social change in the last half-century. Commonly the architects of the movement are referenced as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. However, the Beat Generation was much bigger than six “white” men who wrote novels and poetry about disenfranchised youths of the 1950s. The Beat Generation had at its center several women and artists of color who have helped to redefine the movement, such as Joan Vollmer, Bob Kaufman, Raúl Salinas, and Anne Waldman. This project troubles the categorization of the Beat Generation as a static movement in postwar America, and redefines it as an adaptive ideology that continues through today’s Beat Movement. In this dissertation, I have broken down the three most prominent rhetorical elements that have kept the Beat Movement operating for over sixty years. The first element is the Beat

desire to write for the underclasses of America and eventually to produce writers to write from the underclasses. The second is the importance placed on performance in their poetry and how that has changed the face of poetry over the last half century. The third is the ability to build a community through small presses and magazines, while at the same time pushing the boundaries of gender roles, queer relationships, and interraciality.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION:
FROM THE BEAT GENERATION TO THE BEAT MOVEMENT

The Beat Generation is a name synonymous with wild cross-country road trips, drugs, and open sexuality. In essence, the Beat Generation is considered the precursor to the counterculture of the 1960s. It was spearheaded by three men in particular: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. These three writers all wrote works that challenged the term “literature” in mid-20th century America. Kerouac’s *On the Road* sent a thousand teenagers hitchhiking across America in search of the “IT” that is the soul of America. Ginsberg’s *Howl* is considered “the poem that changed America” (Shinder 3) through its confessional tribute to his friends whom he considered the “best minds of my generation” (Ginsberg, *Poems* 57). William S. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* is considered the “novel that destroyed the novel” (R. Johnson Interview) by giving a brutal look at a junkie’s world and offering a scathing criticism of America at the same time. Two out of three of these works were challenged in open court for being “obscene.” Both *Howl* in 1956 and *Naked Lunch* in 1965 faced obscenity charges and were put on trial to determine if they were actually “literature.” In the end, two different state courts did not consider these texts obscene and the barrier between obscenity and literature was forever blurred, giving birth to a wave of publications that challenged America’s view of drugs,

This dissertation follows the style of *MLA*.

sexuality, and social consciousness. But the question arises as to, what exactly is the Beat Generation?

Trying to define the Beat Generation is like trying to define what it is to be an American. The concept of being “Beat” differed from individual to individual, and that gave it its power and fluidity of definition. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the Beat Generation “is a group of American writers and artists popular in the 1950s and early 1960s, influenced by Eastern philosophy and religion and known especially for their use of nontraditional forms and their rejection of conventional social values.” In the late 1950s, Allen Ginsberg was asked about the Beat Generation, and according to Ginsberg the definition of Beat is “Exhausted at the bottom of the world looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society” (Charters xviii). In the 1980s, Gary Snyder, a prominent Beat poet from San Francisco, defined the Beat Generation as “A particular state of mind within a definable time frame, sometime in the early 50s up until the mid-60s when jazz was replaced by Rock N’ Roll and marijuana was replaced by LSD. It is a new generation of youth that jumped on board and the word beatnik changed to Hippie” (xvi). Jack Kerouac is credited with the actual naming of the Beat Generation based on his observations of the overworked, underpaid American working-class man and the outlaws of society like Neal Cassady, car thief, hustler, and all-around ladies man.

One of the major achievements of the Beat Generation was its ability to break through literary barriers and bring literature to the streets. They did this

in a number of ways, by holding poetry readings where the poems could be heard and appreciated in coffeehouses and art galleries around the world, by disregarding the academic models for writing poetry and literature, and by practicing a more lyrical prose that mixed in musical rhythms as well as the common speech of the times. Hustlers, drug dealers, and misanthropes became the archetypes for the Beat protagonist and the plots became the lives of these characters. Because of this attention to an America that was not being portrayed in much of the literature and poetry of the times, the Beats became an underground phenomenon and a part of the mainstream consciousness as symbols of the changing face of America and the world in the mid-20th Century.

The Beat Generation is credited with writing the books that would kick-start a worldwide phenomenon, which included the Beatniks, the Hippies, the drug and LSD culture, and the sexual revolution, along with popularizing the spiritual movement of Buddhism in America. The commonly told story of the Beat Generation is that it is a static literary and social movement that occurred from 1944 to roughly 1961 and included mostly “white” men who decided to write about the underclasses of America, while promoting the music they enjoyed: jazz. The Beat Generation would then dissolve into the Hippies and other counterculture movements and that would be the end of their story, like the Lost Generation before them. Much of the scholarship on the Beat Generation would focus only on this specific time period and only with certain key figures like Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and sometimes Gregory Corso.

Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs make up what is considered “The Beat Trinity,” but as Gregory Corso said, “Three guys don’t make up a generation” (What Happened). There were literally dozens of writers, poets, and artists that made up the Beat Generation, such as Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Lew Welch, Michael McClure, LeRoi Jones, Kenneth Rexroth, Neal Cassady, Jo Anne Kyger, Diana Di Prima, Joyce Johnson, and Anne Waldman. One of the unique characteristics of the Beat Generation was its inclusiveness. Everyone could be Beat. Black, white, Jewish, Buddhist, man, woman, rich or poor, all were allowed.

Within the past ten years there has been a good deal of necessary attention paid to the women in the Beat Generation because of scholars like Nancy Grace, Ronna C. Johnson, and Jennie Skerl. Even more recently there has been some attention paid to the diverse racial makeup of the Beats with attention to Bob Kaufman, LeRoi Jones, Oscar Zeta Acosta, and Raúl Salinas because of scholars like Manuel Luis Martinez, Rod Hernandez, and Maria Damon. These interventions have broadened the scope of what the Beat Generation actually was and how far their influence reached by challenging the notion that it was only a “white” boy’s club. However, none of this scholarship has investigated the Beat Generation as a fluid social and poetical movement that embedded in their philosophy certain rhetorical elements that have allowed for its existence as a continuing Beat Movement.

This project works to show how the architects of the Beat Generation created a literary and social movement that is meant to change, evolve, and

continue to exist through poets, activists, and teachers. Today, the Beat Movement continues the legacy of the original Beat Generation architects but also challenges the commonly held assumptions about the Beats. This Beat Movement is shaped by poets and writers that either have direct connections to Beat writers, have been deeply influenced by the original Beat Generation's work, or have worked to change and redefine what it means to be Beat. This dissertation challenges the history of the Beat Generation by including and championing figures that have not received much attention as Beats, such as Bob Kaufman, LeRoi Jones, Ted Joans, Joan Vollmer, and Raúl Salinas, and centers the role of the Beat women as key architects to the movement. Currently, the Beat Movement has several women who are at its center, such as Anne Waldman and Karen Minzer. The role of women in the Beat Movement is not without precedent because several women were originally involved in the Beat Generation and even helped engineer the movement.

The women of the Beat Generation were fearless. In her essay, "Sisters, Saints, and Sibyls: Women and the Beats," Brenda Knight describes these women as "...talented rebels with enough courage and creative spirit to turn their backs on 'the good life' the fifties promised and forge their way to San Francisco and Greenwich Village" (3). The women who would become associated with the Beat movement felt very much like the men, betrayed by the American Dream. They wanted to break out of their roles as housewives and secretaries and be artists. They found refuge with these intelligent creative outsiders who wanted to find a better way, but these women faced obstacles

unlike those of the men of their time. Women during this time faced many dangers that the men of the time could not possibly conceive of, such as being committed to insane asylums by their families and a society that wanted women kept in "their place."

Throughout the '40s and '50s, there were a good number of women who would socialize with these writers and were part of their lives as lovers and companions. Many of these women became poets and writers in their own right and are now garnering more attention. In the beginning, the women were viewed more as muses than actual active participants, but as the sixties approached, more women began to break from tradition and began to write and live as writers and poets. Because of these women's continuing efforts to break through gender barriers and challenge society's assumptions about the roles of women as writers, poets, and organizers, the Beat Movement continues. The role of women of color is also important to the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement. Perhaps one of the most important women of color was Alene Lee who was an African American woman integral to the Beat Generation in the 1950s until her death in 1993. Her participation challenged the view of the Beats as a "white" man's movement. Alene Lee was first thrust into the spotlight when Jack Kerouac made her the protagonist of his 1953 novel, *The Subterraneans* and made their relationship the plot of the novel. Several years after an African American woman was showcased in a Beat novel, several women of color continue to participate in the Beat Movement. Currently, the role of Chicanas in

the Beat Movement is prominent with women like Lorna Dee Cervantes, a Chicana Native Beat poet and Tammy Melody Gomez, a Tejana Beat Poet.

People of color have for a long time been overlooked in the research of the Beats, perhaps because of the focus on the traditional views of “black” and “white”. Key figures like Bob Kaufman, who was an African American Jewish poet, LeRoi Jones, the African American radical poet who became Amiri Baraka, and Raúl Salinas, a Chicano Native Beat Poet helped to change the concepts of race and cultural involvement in the Beat Generation and Beat Movement. Even the “key architects” of the Beat Generation were racialized throughout their childhoods. Throughout this project, the category of “white” is troubled as it applies to Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Hettie Jones because throughout their youth they were considered French Canadian and Jewish respectively and not “white” by the communities they grew up in. By positioning these Beat writers as “ethnic whites” and not simply “white” we complicate the Black/White binary and open a discussion as to how the connections to African American and Chican@ (Chicano and Chicana combined) cultures are deeper and more complex than have been previously conceived. As Kerouac and Ginsberg’s racial categorization is complicated we can see that their writing styles and approaches to literature include a heavy dose of cultural integration.

The Beat Generation has always had a vested interest in creating a new form of literature and it becomes apparent in their commitment to “capturing the moment” and relating their life experiences through an authentic voice. This concept was an idea that Ginsberg and Kerouac had when they first began to

engineer the Beat Generation. It was a concept borrowed from Walt Whitman that Ginsberg called "The New Vision." It was an attempt to synthesize their ideas formed in conversation into a philosophy that granted art a powerful political role. The New Vision offered an alternative to the well-cultivated terrain presented by Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren or the New Critics of the 1940s. The New Critics offered a way of approaching literature that privileged the text over all else and excluded the role of the author or the social conditions surrounding the writing of a particular text. The New Vision offered something different; it offered a new way to live life. The elements of the New Vision were:

- 1) Uncensored self-expression is the seed of creativity.
- 2) The artist's consciousness is expanded through nonrational means: derangement of the senses, via drugs, dreams, hallucinatory states, and visions.
- 3) Art supersedes the dictates of conventional morality. (Miles, *Ginsberg* 179)

The idea of the New Vision stands at the core of the Beat philosophy and it challenged the academic fervor of the times. The Beat philosophy still challenges current academic fervor, but its intent is to change the role of literature throughout everyday society. As time moved on, the New Vision became the Vision of the Beat Generation and a foundational philosophy of the Beat Movement. Throughout the work of the Beat Generation and its challenges to how literature should be approached came the execution of that literature. In

this project, the focus is on the poetry of the movement and the rhetorical elements of their poetry since the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement are predominantly poetic movements.

Because poetry is one of the key literary vehicles of the Beats, performance becomes a key element in which the Beats changed the world of poetry. The Beat Generation became a viable poetic movement on the night of October 6, 1955, when Allen Ginsberg first read "Howl" before an audience. On what has come to be known as the Six Gallery Reading, the reading of a poem became just as important as the composition and publication of that poem. What the Beats introduced into the world was the poetry reading as performed by relatively unknown poets reading unfinished or unpublished works before an audience that would seem better suited for a jazz club than a poetry reading. The narrative of what a poetry reading was changed after that night and the Beat Generation was now a performance movement as well as a literary movement. For the Beats and many others since the 1950s, the performance of a poem becomes a crucial element in its composition. Poets began to tailor their poetry to be heard as well as read and this changed the language that the poets used. Poetry, in particular Beat poetry, began to be written in a conversational vernacular style that borrowed from the hipster language of the streets or the lyrical musings of folk, blues, and jazz musicians. As the poetry reading began to focus on unpublished poets instead of academic accepted poets and the language of poetry began to change, the idea that anyone could be a poet became more of a reality.

The Beat poets, in essence, became responsible for the democratization of poetry and the proliferation of poetry readings that started were done so by almost anyone willing to find a space to read at and set up a line of people wanting to read. It was a change that shocked a world of poetry that up until the 1950s did not hold readings in coffee shops or converted mechanic garages, but instead read at university halls and libraries. Many poetry readings, before the Beats, were given by well-known poets who either read alone or hired actors to read their poetry for them. The shift in the poetry world even affected the publishing houses and the presses that, because of a portable printing press known as the mimeograph, allowed for cheap publications of books and magazines. The Mimeograph Revolution took hold in the 1960s and relatively unknown poets and writers began to find publishers that did not belong to the academic circles in New York. City Lights Books, which first published Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*, is probably the most successful small press of the movement and is one of the biggest symbols of success for small presses in general. City Lights, started by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (a Beat poet), was the engine for the promotion of the Beat Generation and continues to be so today. Many of the books published through these presses did not receive the marketing budgets of the major publishing houses so much of the promotion of an author's work came from the author's going on tour giving readings and selling their work personally.

The poetry readings are important vehicles for marketing and promotion of alternatively published books and magazines. This is one reason why the

performance of poetry becomes such an important element to the Beat Movement. Since much of the Beat community were either working class or middle class, the amount of money involved in the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement is limited to the poet, the publisher, and donations from the audience members. For this reason, the Beats have always encouraged strong connections among themselves. The forming of a community of artists was imperative for the continuation and success of the movement. Since many of the readers and buyers of the books and magazines were poets themselves, strong relationships needed to be kept and maintained. In many ways, the forming of the community became the key element to its continued existence. Within the Beat community, new ideas are always introduced and new poets are coming and going. In an interview, the Beat poet Antler proclaimed that “The Beats are a tribe” and that sense of family and commitment to each other is what gives it its most enduring appeal.

At the same time, their willingness to experiment and challenge the social traditions and values has led to some troubled relationships in the process. Many of the Beat Generation’s relationships were failures because they sought to push the envelope of accepted social values, and many times their ideals and reality collided and caused collateral damage along the way, such as the queer relationship of Joan Vollmer and William S. Burroughs, the interracial relationship of Jack Kerouac and Alene Lee, as well as the interracial marriage of LeRoi and Hettie Jones. Many of the Beat Generation writers neglected their families and their partners in pursuit of their literary agendas. The personal and

romantic relationships of these individuals are often sacrificed for the continuing success of the poetic community and that is one thing that the Beat Generation was never able to reconcile. The Beat Generation never promoted violence in their work, and in fact they abhorred any references to violence. However, the Beats were met with much tragedy throughout their lives, such as the accidental shooting death of one of its most important early members, Joan Vollmer.

On September 6, 1951, William S. Burroughs had just returned from a failed expedition to South America to find the elusive and mystical drug, *yagé*. The events of this expedition are recounted in Burroughs' novel *Queer*, but what happened after is left unwritten, at least by Burroughs. During this time, Burroughs and Vollmer had been living as common-law husband and wife for three years and had moved to Mexico City so that Burroughs could avoid prosecution in New Orleans on drug charges. Mexico City was supposed to be a new start for the volatile couple (Burroughs being gay and Joan being straight). At the time, they had two children, Julie (from a previous marriage) and Billy Burroughs, Jr., and both Burroughs and Vollmer were drunk or stoned pretty much all day. Joan Vollmer was fighting polio and watching her body deteriorate while Burroughs was chasing boys, one in particular, Lewis Marker. On that night, they were having a party and it was clear that their relationship was having problems. Joan, at this time, was already pretty well inebriated and Burroughs was exhausted and aggravated from his failed attempt "to make" Lewis Marker.

Many of the details of this night were collected by James Grauerholz and turned into an essay entitled, "The Death of Joan Vollmer Burroughs: What Really Happened?" At some point, during the night, Joan Vollmer placed a hi-ball glass filled with tequila on top of her head and asked her common-law husband, William S. Burroughs to shoot it off. It was a stupid stunt that they had done before, but on this day, Burroughs' aim was just a little low and the bullet entered her right temple. After the shot, there was a dead silence that follows the firing of a gunshot. Vollmer's head cocked to the right and for a second there was no movement and so Burroughs, thinking she was putting on a performance, said, "Quit hammin' it up, Joan." There was no response and so a fellow party member standing next to Burroughs, Lewis Marker, shouted, "Bill, I think you hit her." (R. Johnson 154). It was only after she slumped down and let out a last sigh that Burroughs and every one in the room realized that she was mortally wounded. Burroughs started screaming and pulling his hair out as someone from the party called the Red Cross and she was taken away to die an hour later in a Mexico City hospital. It was an incident that scarred Burroughs and the fledgling Beat Generation forever. However, this was not an isolated event for the Beat Generation because their willingness to push boundaries during the 1950s was often faced with excessiveness, incarceration, and institutionalization.

Because of the Beat Generation's mission to change the consciousness of the world they knew, they made plenty of mistakes, but because of the work they produced the Beats opened the door for change to occur. Part of the Beat

philosophy is as Erik Mortenson writes, “[T]he personal is already political, and the Beats’ insistence on spontaneous expression within the moment carries with it a host of assumptions that challenge the postwar status quo. But Beat writings provide models for turning the passing moment into a site for collective action” (155). This collective action is what has laid the groundwork for the Beat Movement to continue and change with every poet who carries the banner of Beat.

In this dissertation, there are three prominent rhetorical elements that have kept the Beat Movement operating for over sixty years. Each chapter examines the rhetorical elements through the people that helped create the Beat ethos. Chapter II addresses the Beat desire to write for the underclasses of America and eventually to produce writers to write from the underclasses. Chapter III describes the importance of performance in their poetry and how that has changed the face of poetry over the last half century. Chapter IV explains how the Beats created a community through small presses and magazines, while at the same time pushed the boundaries of gender roles, queer relationships, and interraciality. The conclusion, Chapter V, looks at the role of the Beat Movement today. Below is a brief summary of the remaining chapters.

Chapter II deals with the writing from the underclasses. At the core of the Beat Generation is the desire to capture the “real” America and to create an aesthetic that would champion the underrepresented groups of America in a voice that was authentic. The early Beats were Romantics, following in the tradition of Walt Whitman and taking a cue from his work and their desire to

capture the moment led them to experience America and document everything in poetry and prose. This desire to create a new poetics to speak for the underclasses comes from two of the early Beats, Jack Kerouac's and Allen Ginsberg's own underprivileged backgrounds. This chapter is comprised of two different parts; the first retells the histories Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg as "ethnic whites," and the second part casts Bob Kaufman and Raúl Salinas as key architects in the creation of the Beat Movement.

Jack Kerouac was a French Canadian Catholic son of a printing press operator, who was not considered "white" where he grew in Lowell, Massachusetts, but "le blanc negre" or a "white black." Being part of a working class family where both his father and mother worked and being raised in a racist environment led Kerouac to want to represent the American he knew, which was working class and "non-white." Allen Ginsberg was also not considered "white" when he was growing up in Paterson, New Jersey, because he was Jewish. However, for Ginsberg, his unique upbringing colored his views of America because he was the son of a Russian Communist and a Czech Socialist, whose grandparents fled Russia and Europe during the late 19th Century. Ginsberg was raised in an activist household where family outings were either Communist meetings or political campaign events for socialist candidates. Growing up in a nontraditional household and having a strong sense of fighting for the common man led Ginsberg to champion the outlaw, the outsider, and the activist in his work. Kerouac and Ginsberg brought the plight of the outsider into America's consciousness by writing about the underclasses,

but were not able to accomplish the goal of writing from the racialized underclasses. Since Kerouac and Ginsberg were coming of age in the late 1940s and 50s, the concept of whiteness had shifted and they were encompassed by the “white” category, as “Black” became a category. Because Kerouac and Ginsberg were not “white,” but “ethnic white” they were able to maneuver their work into a liminal space where the Beat Generation could exist.

Bob Kaufman, an African American Jewish poet operating out of North Beach San Francisco, felt a kinship with the philosophy of the Beat Generation and began to expand the definition of what being “Beat” meant. Kaufman becomes the key architect in bringing race into Beat literature in a way that Kerouac or Ginsberg could never do. Kaufman was the racialized underclass American that could bring suffering as an element into their poetics authentically. He was the lynchpin between the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement, since much of the Beat Movement draws its lineage from Kaufman. From creating the poetry reading scene in North Beach to the creation of one of the longest lasting Beat magazines, *Beatitude*, Kaufman is an important figure. Kaufman helped the Beat Generation evolve from being on the fringe of the underclasses and looking in to coming from the underclasses and creating a fringe that looks into the “white” middleclass world.

Because of Bob Kaufman, a young Chicano troublemaker found the Beat Generation that helped to turn him into a poet. Raúl Salinas was a Mexican American kid from the East Side of Austin, TX, growing up poor and living in a neighborhood fraught with criminal activity. Out of this neighborhood, Salinas

became a drug dealer and a hustler and because of that background, he was arrested and sent to prison where he received his best education about the racial and social inequalities of America. It was also in prison where he would discover that he was a poet. Also, while in prison, he learned how to be an activist and how to use poetry as a vehicle for social justice. Salinas came to the Beats through the reading of Kaufman and Kerouac's work and because they championed the outlaw, the street hustler, and the working classes, Salinas realized he was already "Beat." Because of Salinas, the Beat Movement gained a solid grounding in Chicano and Native thought and further pushed the importance of social activism.

Chapter III discusses how performance has always been as important as text for the Beat Generation. The attention placed on hearing the poetry was not a new practice when the Beats began to experiment with performing their poetry, but what the Beats did do was popularize the performance of poetry and elevate its importance to that of being published. This was an entirely subversive activity for the Beats because they knew that the major publishing houses and the academic world did not take them seriously. Many of the Beat poets spent a lot of time frequenting jazz haunts and underground nightclubs where the audience was expected to be a part of the performance by hoots, shouts, and interaction with the musicians. The Beats loved the energy that this created and thought that they could translate this energy to the poetry world. This chapter is divided into three parts, with the first focusing on the importance of jazz on the Beat Generation and how that affected the poetry they were

writing and performing. The second part deals with two key African American poets that helped bring jazz into Beat poetry: Ted Joans and LeRoi Jones. The third will look at the history of performing poetry, the Beat Generation's history of performance poetry, as well as the influence on spoken word, slam, and the new poetics of the Beat Movement.

Ted Joans came to the Beat Generation looking for a place where he could mix together his surrealist interests with his interest in jazz into his poetry. Coming from the Midwest, Joans found that life stifling and wanted to flee to New York as soon as he could. In 1950, Joans did just that and landed on the Lower East Side of New York where he would meet Kerouac, Ginsberg, and others. At the time, the Beats seemed to be more accepting of his particular outlook on life as an African American surrealist. Bringing a unique perspective into the Beat Generation, he was able to diversify this literary movement. During his time with the Beat Generation, Joans changed the face of the group by adding a Black perspective into the movement and opening the door for other African Americans, such as LeRoi Jones, to be a part of the Beat Generation.

LeRoi Jones came from a different space than Ted Joans because LeRoi's family was considered "middle class," but it was a Black middle class, which was two steps below white middle class. LeRoi was introduced to the Beat Generation through Ted and found it a different space than any he had every experienced. It was a fringe space where he could explore his interests in jazz and mix together his experiences into a new poetics that did not champion

academic prosody. One of the most important contributions that LeRoi Jones made to the Beat Generation was to make the Beat Generation more overtly political and socially aware. Jones would later become Amiri Baraka and cut most of his ties with the Beats, but not before leaving his mark by co-editing two important Beat magazines, *Yugen* and *Floating Bear*.

Both Ted Joans and LeRoi Jones were essential to the integration of jazz and orality into Beat poetry, but when they came to the Beat Generation, there was already a precedent set by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kaufman, and others that privileged orality and sound above abstractionism and allusion. One of the most recognizable elements of the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement is the poetry reading. This is why the Six Gallery Reading becomes of paramount importance. The role of the poetry reading marked by the legendary Six Gallery leads to the creation of many other poetry readings and the eventual birth of the Spoken Word movement and Slam. Over the past thirty years, Spoken Word and Slam became the most popular poetic forms amongst the youth of America. In many ways, these performance-based poetic forms are the evolution of the poetry performed back in the 1950s and 60s.

Chapter IV deals with the Beats as a community. The Beat Generation was nothing if not a group of friends who wrote for each other before they wrote for the world. In many ways, the Beat Generation resembled a family of artists who fought, loved, and wrote for similar goals but always remained close until their deaths. This kind of loyalty to each other is what made the Beats a community that could change the world. Since its inception, the Beat

Generation was always a group effort with everyone pitching in their ideas and their work to allow this little community grow into hundreds of poets and artists all around the world. The Beats were pioneers not only in literature, but also in alternative lifestyles. Their relationships with one another were as important as the poetry they produced because their lives were the most important narrative in their work. This chapter is comprised of two parts. The first will explain how the Beat Generation maintained their community through the creation of their own small presses and magazines and the second part will look at how three particular relationships helped to push against mainstream gender and relationship roles.

The 1960s saw the exploits of what has come to be known as the Mimeograph Revolution, which was an explosion of small presses and little magazines printed cheaply. The small press was a relatively unheard of form of publication before the 1950s because the cost of publication of a book was either too expensive or was controlled by the major publishing houses of New York City. In 1955, when a young Lawrence Ferlinghetti started a small press called City Lights and published Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*, small presses were launched into viable publishing venues. It was not simply the publication of *Howl* that changed the fate of small presses, but the obscenity trial that ensued involving the publication and distribution of that little book of poetry. The obscenity trial made national headlines and brought the small press world as well as the Beat Generation into the public eye. After this trial, City Lights Books became a reputable publishing house alongside another alternative press

called Grove Press, which published controversial books like *Tropic of Cancer* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The 1950s was a time of great change for the literary and publishing worlds and this was helped along by the publication of mimeographed magazines.

The mimeographed magazine became popular in the 1960s when editors like Ed Sanders began to publish their own cheaply designed magazines and give them away. The consensus amongst mimeographed magazine editors was not to make money, but to expose a new form of literature to the world. These magazines quickly became the newswires for the underground poetry and activist worlds and as the counterculture movements grew so did the readerships of these magazines. In the 1960s, the most important mimeographed and little magazines were the Beat magazines *Yugen*, *Floating Bear*, *Fuck You/ a magazine of the arts*, as well as the *Evergreen Review*, which published many of the Beat writers. Since these magazines did not have the distribution of major magazines, distribution was limited to local venues and the editors' personal address books. On the East Coast, the center for the creation of many of these little magazine was the Lower East Side of New York City. The West Coast had its mimeographed magazines based out of North Beach in San Francisco and the most prominent magazine to come out of that area was Bob Kaufman's *Beatitude*.

In the Beat Generation there are three relationships that challenged the accepted social constructs of what a relationship should be in the mid-20th Century. Even though none of these relationships were successful, they opened the door

for alternative relationships to prosper. The queer relationship of William S. Burroughs and Joan Vollmer placed friendship over sexual preference, while the interracial relationship of Jack Kerouac and Alene Lee challenged the taboo of American racism of a “white” man dating a Black woman by showcasing it in literature, and the marriage of LeRoi and Hettie Jones included not only an interracial relationship, but interracial children, and an artistic working relationship in the 1960s. The Beat community nurtured all these relationships that challenged traditional heteronormativity, which in the 1950s and 60s was a dangerous endeavor. These relationships helped shape the world to come and because of their activist mentality helped to break down many barriers in racial and social relations.

In the conclusion, the Beat Movement is discussed. The Beat Movement today has taken its cues from the Beat Generation and has grown and adapted to a changing America. One of the main ways that it has continued to exist and create new poets is by founding its own school through Naropa University and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. The Kerouac School was founded on the principle that the real world has to directly affect the academic world. This school, as part of the first Buddhist college established in the United States, the Naropa University, focuses chiefly on literature and creative writing. Since its creation, Anne Waldman has served as director of the school and has brought her Beat philosophy into the curriculum. From this school, many writers and poets, such as Hedwig Gorski and Karen Minzer have graduated to practice their own Beat aesthetic. This school has operated for over 38 years and

continues to promote poetry and activism as well as teach students how to promote poetic activism in their own communities. Because the Kerouac School is such a diverse school, they have integrated many different poetics into their curriculum, such as Native American, Buddhist, Spoken Word, and Chican@. Although this school is important, it is not the only venue for the continuation of the movement.

The Beat Movement these days is a mixture of spoken word artists, Slam artists, older Beat poets, and community organizers. Perhaps the biggest influence on the Beat Movement aside from its predecessor is the Chican@ movement. Currently, the mixture of African American and Chican@ aesthetics has changed Beat into being more politically aware and more culturally diverse. Over the years though, the Chicano and Chicana communities have produced writers such as Raúl Salinas, Ricardo Sanchez, Oscar Zeta Acosta, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Tammy Melody Gomez, who do not quite fit into prescribed categories and have written from a different perspective and so have turned to the Beats for inspiration. Because of these writers, Chicanismo has become a vital component in the Beat Movement. The connection might have to do with their life experiences and the Beat's appreciation of Latin and Native cultures. The Beats spent a lot of time in Mexico and Latin America and have written extensively about America's Latin heritage. Because Chican@s are in many ways liminal beings that exist in-between cultures: Mexican, Native American, and mainstream "white" American, they have found a space with the Beats.

The Beats promote the creation of spaces for writing, performing, and networking because they fill a need to find a space for fringe, outsider artists. Karen Minzer has created such a space in her hometown of Dallas called Wordspace. This is an organization that holds monthly readings, as well as workshops, and performances for writers and artists, and in Minzer's case Beat writers. In Austin, Raúl Salinas established Resistencia as a bookstore and community center that also fosters a space for Chican@, Native, and Beat aesthetics. These spaces are just a few of the places where the Beat Movement continues. There are others around the country and they continue to grow.

CHAPTER II

I CAUGHT GOD PEEKING THROUGH THE HOLE IN THE SOUL OF MY
SHOE, SO I ASKED HIM FOR A DOLLAR: POETRY FOR THE
UNDERCLASSES, THE OUTLAW, AND THE OUTSIDER

One of the driving forces behind the Beat Generation was to capture the “real” America and “real” American experiences. For Kerouac, Ginsberg, and many others that real American experience is the experience of the underclasses: the poor, the working class, the outlaw, and the hustler. These people are the backbone of American society, and the Beats were determined to showcase this side of America. In creating a literature for the underclasses they championed and adopted an artistic style that best reflected these unique American cultures through the voice and vernacular of these classes of people. It is the essence of Beat poetry, or as Alan Kaufman writes,

[i]t exists in the lonely, broken imaginations of poets and revolutionaries, of runaway young bohos and artistic visionaries, asleep in their cardboard box beds outside Greyhound bus stations or else burning light to dawn in ugly rooms as they pour out their last ounce of courage into poems, manifestos, novels, manuscripts, and songs that no one might ever read or believe in, because they are too radically on the edge. (3)

This sense of writing oneself out of loneliness and disillusionment with society is one of the core elements of Beatness. It is prevalent in the works of Jack Kerouac, Bob Kaufman, and Raúl Salinas. For all of them, writing for the

underclasses began as a way to speak for their own family and friends. It was the world that they grew up in and knew firsthand. Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kaufman, and Salinas came from working-class backgrounds and they all experienced the disadvantages of being on the low rung of the capitalist ladder as well as experiencing the cruelties of racism. None of these figures enjoyed the privilege of “white” society since none of these figures were “white,” not even Kerouac and Ginsberg. Jack Kerouac was a French Canadian son of a printing press operator and a shoe factory worker. Allen Ginsberg was the son of a Jewish-Russian teacher and a strongly Communist housewife. Bob Kaufman was an African American Jewish hipster from New Orleans who worked several years in the Merchant Marines. Raúl Salinas was a pachuco hipster from La Loma (East Austin, Texas), who was dealing drugs by the time he was fifteen and sent to prison by the time he was eighteen. All of these men lived the life they wrote about.

Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kaufman, and Salinas all grew up living in oppressed circumstances for their racial and working-class status. All of them grew up to write about their lives and worked to create a poetry that would speak for people that experience this life. They became instrumental in creating Beat poetry to speak for and from the underclasses. First they began to affect America and then eventually the world. They all took on a responsibility to write about the invisible classes of America, to give voice to the America that they saw but never read about or saw in movies. In order to truly express this they needed something that would encompass this feeling, so they adopted the

term “Beat” because it encompassed the way they felt. Allen Ginsberg in his essay, “A Definition of the Beat Generation,” wrote, “So, the original street usage meant exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise. Or, as it was once implied, finished, undone, completed, in the dark night of the soul or in the cloud of unknowing” (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 237). But Ginsberg insists that it is not only a desolate existence; being “beat” also means “Open,” as in receptive. Ginsberg writes, “‘Open,’ as in Whitmanic sense of ‘openness,’ equivalent to humility, and so it *was* interpreted in various circles to mean emptied out, exhausted, and at the same time wide-open—perceptive and receptive to a vision” (237). There was always a sense of hope in the Beat philosophy and that is how they chose to write about the world of the poor, the outsider, and the outlaw.

In order to be able to reach a large audience, the early Beats had to get their works published, and they were able to navigate the extremely elitist and conventional publishing world. Ginsberg and Kerouac, in particular, were able to maneuver themselves into the straight publishing world through first building an underground readership and secondly because of their unique positions in American society. They were able to publish works that were often seen as shocking and obscene to the traditional literary world because both Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg existed in a unique space. They were socially considered “white” by the mid-1950s and that gave them a position that many writers of colors could not have achieved. However, for Kerouac and Ginsberg,

they grew up not being white at all. For a long time, they were considered “white ethnics” who were one step above Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans on the racial ladder. “White ethnics” were those “races” that usually came over during the early 1900s migration from Eastern and Southern Europe, people such as the Italians, the Greeks, and Jewish peoples, but also some Western Europeans like the Irish and the French-Canadians (See Roediger).

For many years until 1955, racial categorization for the United States was simply two categories: White or Black. Ethnicity, according to the U.S. government, was not a category that carried any weight against discrimination. Legally anyone classified as white could not claim discrimination under the 14th Amendment. In 1954, literally two weeks after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Topeka Kansas was heard before the United States Supreme Court, a second equally important case was heard. This case, *Hernandez v. Texas*, was important to the fight for the rights of those considered “white, but a class apart” (Sheridan par. 26). This case was crucial in designating Mexican Americans or Latinos as a separate racial category, but its second objective is what affected the category of “White” and helped open the door for “other white races” to be protected under the 14th Amendment. The argument of this case was the question, “Whether race and nationality could be construed similarly under the auspices of the Fourteenth Amendment?” (Sheridan par. 28). The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, “When the existence of a distinct class is demonstrated, and it is shown that the laws, as written or as applied,

single out that class for different treatment not based on some reasonable classification, the guarantees of the Constitution have been violated” (Sheridan par. 30). This landmark decision changed the course of racial categorization and race relations for other races in America as much as *Brown v. Board of Education* did for African Americans. This decision along with the *Brown* case led to the creation of distinct racial categories because now “nationality” was included under the definition of race.

Although this ruling did not have a direct effect on race relations amongst “white” people’s daily racism, it did change things politically. “Nationality” was now something that held weight according to the U.S. government, so racial identities began to shift. Whiteness began to encompass anyone of light skin and so people who were once considered by their ethnicity were now “white.” What did this mean for people like Kerouac and Ginsberg who deeply identified with their ethnicity, French-Canadian Catholic and Russian Jewish respectively? Both Kerouac and Ginsberg were able to slip between the social stigmas of race and class and were able to gain access to New York publishers in a way that someone of darker skin could not. They were able to be a voice for their ethnic and social class that allowed the gates to be opened for people like Bob Kaufman and Raúl Salinas to see publication. They were able to frequent the jazz haunts and lead Ted Joans, African American Beat poet, to say of Kerouac, “he was neither white nor black” (Meltzer 86).

The Beat Generation from its inception had always deeply believed that their work should speak for the worlds that they grew up in and also to create

American heroes that reflected the people they saw struggling every day to find a place in this world: the outsider, the outlaw, and the poor workers of America. In order to understand why they chose to write about this world, the stories of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg will have to be retold as working class “white ethnics.” This analysis will be followed by an introduction of Bob Kaufman and Raúl Salinas as architects of the Beat Movement, both of whom belong to defined racial categories but did not conform strictly to those racial identities in their lives and their work.

Part I: You Don’t Know Jack! Jack Kerouac As A French-Canadian Catholic Poor Boy

In Julian Carter’s *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*, the case is made that “white” as we know it today did not encompass all Eurocentric light-skinned persons, but that there were varying degrees of “whiteness” with varying degrees of privilege. According to Carter, “In the Gilded Age, the ‘ethnic’ whites, such as Irish, Italians, and Jews, were likely to be classified as less perfectly white than WASPS on the basis of their presumed sexual license and its resemblance to the failures of self-control attributed to African Americans (with whom, indeed, they were sometimes alleged to fornicate)” (114). This view of “ethnic” whites carries well into the mid-twentieth century, and Kerouac was not a WASP. Jack Kerouac was born in 1922 in the small town of Lowell, Massachusetts, and as Gerald Nicosia notes, in Lowell, French Canadians as well as others were referred to as “les blancs

negres” or the “white blacks.” French Canadians who lived in ghettos were often seen as second-class citizens. “Part of that,” Nicosia claims, “came from the fact that the French did not generally push their kids academically, toward college, etc., as the Greeks and Irish did, but took the lowest-paying, backbreaking jobs, like blacks in other cities” (qtd. in Grace 61). Kerouac’s first language was not English; it was a kind of Quebecois called *Joual*. Language played a big part in the disconnection that Kerouac felt from privileged “white” culture because his accent as a child was still a pronounced French. Kerouac would always have an ambivalent relationship with both his ethnicity and the language of his childhood. In *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac writes, “confession after confession, I am a Canuck, I could not speak English til I was 5 or 6, at 16 I spoke with a halting accent” (3). Even in 1959, when he is writing *The Subterraneans*, Kerouac feels that his ethnicity was a secret that he must confess to the world. He was French Canadian and an English as Second Language speaker. Ironically, Kerouac is known for his masterful grasp of English and the rhythm of language, but throughout his childhood and teen years he was often teased for his stunted use of English. According to Nicosia, “[H]e had so much trouble with this second language (English) that some of his teachers thought him slow-witted” (*Memory Babe* 32). This was common of how New Englanders saw French Canadians. They were a tight-knit community because of the prejudice they felt from all directions.

During the first big immigration push of the 20th Century when thousands of Eastern and Western Europeans were making their way across the

Atlantic and crossing through Ellis Island, the French Canadians were migrating south from Quebec and British Columbia. Kerouac's grandparents were part of this southern immigration. In 1890 they settled in Nashua, New Hampshire, in a section of the city called the "French Village" (Edington 26). By the beginning of the 20th century, French Canadians made up 25% of New England, but their arrival and their culture was frowned upon as backward and they were seen as invaders to New England. According to Stephen Edington, biographer of Kerouac's family, "The French Canadians were still the newest group of outsiders to arrive, and therefore found themselves on the lower end of the social pecking order. They lived among themselves, to a large degree married among themselves, spoke their own language, and had their own churches" (27). This is a common practice of new immigrant groups in the United States to have their own neighborhood of the town or city they settled in. This practice is common not simply because it is easier to live with those who share the most in common, but because the dominant society would often push these immigrants out of their society.

What makes French Canadians unique is that they were actually part of the first Europeans to come to the United States that did not cross an ocean; they simply crossed a river. The French Canadians share the most common history with Mexican Americans because they also have a close affinity with their homeland, which is also across a river and maintain stronger connections with their home culture than most other immigrant groups. Like Mexican Americans, the French Canadians suffered similar prejudice and discrimination

from the “Yankee” culture. In “French Canadian Families,” Regis Langelier writes,

Educated Americans admired only Parisian French. The French spoken in New England was disdained. It lacked [in the eyes and ears of Yankee culture] the polish, sophistication, elegance and style...associated with the French from France. Thus the French language, to which Franco-Americans were profoundly loyal, also became a badge of inferiority...They saw themselves because of their religion and their language, as better than they were judged to be, but they were well aware that they were looked down upon. (232).

Both Leo Kerouac and Gabrielle Levesque (Kerouac’s father and mother) were devoutly Catholic and both spoke mostly *Joual*. Throughout Kerouac’s childhood, Kerouac hardly spoke English at home and even though the schools were mostly integrated with other children from around the town, Jack stuck pretty close to his French Canadian neighborhood. Leo Kerouac was a writer and printing press operator and for many years wrote for the local French weekly paper, *L’Impartial*. While working at this paper, he caught the eye of the editors of the larger French paper called *L’Etoile*, which was based out of Lowell, Massachusetts. Leo Kerouac was quickly enamored with *L’Etoile* because its tagline read “Reaches the French-American Population of New Hampshire and New England” (Edington 33). Leo was deeply political and quite proud of his French Canadian heritage, but mostly he was a workingman. During the 1920s

and 30s, there was a strong push for unionization throughout America and Lowell was no exception, but the French Canadian community had a divided attitude toward unions. The Catholic Church deeply opposed unionization, calling the union organizers “Bolshevists,” and they advised the workers that “man was meant to live by the sweat of his brow, and the more hours they worked, the less time they would have to sin” (Nicosia 24). Leo Kerouac and the other French Canadians were dissatisfied with the Church for its stance, and he could be heard standing up against the local Catholic Church. It was common to hear Leo and others say of the local priest, “That sonofabitch is not working two hours a week—the hell with him!” (25). Leo broke his allegiance with the Catholic Church, and in an episode that shocked his French Canadian neighborhood, he told a priest who came to his house to “Get lost!” According to Nicosia, “Leo was not about to serve what saw as a money-making enterprise” (24). Although Gabrielle remained a devout parishioner, she never tried to convince Leo to go back to the Church.

It would be from Leo that Kerouac would get his desire to speak for the workingman, the outsider, and also his love of writing. From his mother he would get his strong devotion to Catholicism, and like his parents he would always be split between two different loyalties, the Catholic Church and the rights of the workingman. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, in the documentary *One Fast Move or I’m Gone: Jack Kerouac’s Big Sur*, said, “Kerouac was a like a man running down the road with a Catholic parachute.” This was the struggle that Kerouac had with his ethnicity and his religion throughout his life and writings. As a

youth Jack played many sports and was very good at football. When Kerouac gained more exposure as a football player, he tried to become indoctrinated in the dominant “white” American culture. Since *Joual* was not a written language, Kerouac never gained a proficiency in writing *Joual*, but he was schooled in French up until his high school years when he wrote and started to speak almost primarily in English. Although he was part of the literary bohemian scenes, as well as part of the Horace Mann Prep School and Columbia University crowds, he often felt like the outsider. In *Book of Sketches*, Kerouac writes, “I, poor French Canadian Ti Jean become / a big sophisticated hipster esthete in / the homosexual arts, I, mutter to / myself in childhood French” (368). Throughout his life he always felt like an immigrant, a stranger in a beat land. Rachel Adams in her book, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America*, writes, “Although born in the United States, Kerouac thus has the divided sensibility of an immigrant who associated one language with the intimacy of home and the other with public life and accomplishment” (155).

Years after the publication of his first novel, *The Town and The City*, Kerouac received a review from a French Canadian reviewer named Yvonne Le Maître and in turn wrote a letter to her about her review, which he swore was his most impactful review. This letter, dated September 8, 1950, is one of the only letters that Kerouac writes about his disconnection from his ethnic heritage: “I cannot write my native language and have no native home any more, and am amazed by that horrible homelessness all French-Canadians abroad in America have” (Kerouac, *Letters Vol. I* 228). This sense of disconnection from dominant

“white” culture in America is one strong reason why he feels more comfortable with the underclasses of America and why he was always searching for the America that advertised its inclusiveness but practiced only exclusivity. Rachel Adams writes, “From childhood, Kerouac was socialized to assume that local and transnational affiliations ran deeper than ties to the nation-state” (153), but Kerouac would always have ambivalence about how this would play out in the America he saw in his cross-country travels when he would meet resistance from the power structure that controlled the police and the universities.

In regards to his language, Kerouac writes in that same letter, “All my knowledge is my ‘French-Canadianness’ and nowhere else. The English language is a tool lately found...so late...At 21 I was still somewhat awkward and illiterate-sounding in my speech and writing. What a mixup” (228-29). Kerouac was always self-conscious about his accent and his handling of the English language, which is what led him to really listen to the flow and rhythm of language. Growing up, Kerouac saw his “bad” English skills as a hindrance to succeed, but as he began to develop his own writing style, he saw the advantages of coming to English late in his childhood. In that same letter he writes, “The reason I handle English words so easily is because it is not my own language. I refashion it to fit French images” (229). Language and imagery for Kerouac became his greatest strength as a writer, but it was his determination to show that he belonged in America that led him to showcase the struggles of the working classes.

Jack Kerouac occupied a strange space in the world of racial and social relations in America in the late 1930s and early 40s in America. Kerouac was successful as a football star and an all around athlete, but because he was French Canadian, he would often get over-looked when getting picked for the team. During these years the Irish were favored and often had more breaks than the French Canadians and even the Italians. Jack did as much as he could to hide his ethnicity in high school, so that he could succeed as a star athlete and always had people guessing what he was. Sometimes when asked what he was, Jack would answer, "I'm Dutch" (Nicosia 48), and leave it at that. However, Kerouac was not above helping other "ethnics" who were getting harassed. In one incident, Kerouac caught a fellow student beating up on his Polish friend, Joe Sorota, in the locker room and proceeded to pull him free of his friend and subdue the assailant. Many fellow students were shocked by Kerouac's reaction, which led many people to question his ethnicity, but he would always kept his ethnicity secret so as not to ruin his chances at getting scholarships to play college ball (Nicosia 47-49).

It would be during his time in high school, Horace Mann Prep School, and Columbia University that he would learn to become invisible as a white man. Kerouac knew that taking pride in his ethnicity would only alienate him more from the world he wanted to gain access to, but at the same time as he became more familiar with the Ivy League world, the more he realized how shallow and exclusive that world was to anyone that didn't have the right lineage. Whiteness in the 1940s was still a very vague concept and what

mattered most was social class after skin color. Jack Kerouac was very aware of this, and even a place as metropolitan as New York still had its deep-seated prejudices. Kerouac found comfort in the jazz haunts of Harlem and the seedy streets of Times Square, where he seemed to be more accepted for being “not quite white” and not being black. Although Kerouac looked white, Rachel Adams writes, “He knew that his whiteness allowed him to at least partially assimilate into alien environments, but he also came to understand it as an impediment to accessing what he saw as the more vital, authentic experiences of people of color” (154). Kerouac felt more at ease with people of color and saw them as the real heritage of America.

In chronicling that American heritage Kerouac cast the dusty pool halls of Denver, the cantinas of San Antonio, and the jazz clubs of San Francisco as protagonists in his novels. He believed that the real story of this land was in its people and their struggles; “Because, after all, what is the ruling thought in the American temperament if it isn’t a purposeful energetic search after useful knowledge. The ‘livelihood of man’ in America instead of the vague and prosy ‘brotherhood of man’ in Europe” (*Letters Vol. 1* 107). On his journey to write the landscape of America he felt he needed to experience America first hand, so he decided to hitchhike from East to West and North to South. America, to Kerouac, was not just the United States, but the entire continent. “My subject as a writer,” Kerouac writes, “is of course America, and simply, I must know everything about it” (107). Kerouac often looked to the spirit of Walt Whitman from “Song of the Open Road”:

You road I enter upon and look around! I believe you are not all that is
here;

I believe that much unseen is also here.

Here the profound lesson of reception, neither preference or denial;

The black with his woolly head, the felon, the diseas'd, the illiterate
person, are not denied;

The birth, the hasting after the physician, the beggar's tramp, the
drunkard's stagger, the laughing party of mechanics,

The escaped youth, the rich person's carriage, the fop, the eloping couple,

The early market-man, the hearse, the moving of furniture into the town,
the return back from the town,

They pass—I also pass—anything passes—none can be interdicted;

None but are accepted—none but are dear to me. (121)

Kerouac heeded Whitman's call to write about the "common people" of America. But for Kerouac, it was more than that it was a way of trying to make his own story of being a "white ethnic" heard through the stories of others he viewed were in the same space he existed in. So even though he traveled all over Mexico and the world, he always came back to America, the land of his ancestors. Kerouac always had a vested interest in his family history and so "[f]or Kerouac, who developed a considerable interest in his ancestry, the act of "comin back to America" was the act of returning to himself, of negotiating his

American identity via his marginal French-Canadian and North American Indian heritage" (Nicholls 526).

Seeing America Through A Whiskey Glass

Travelling across America and recording everything he saw along the way, however romanticized those things were, became Kerouac's trademark. Kerouac often looked to Black and Mexican peoples as having some sort of secret knowledge that he thought allowed them to be free in a way that he could not be. He has often been criticized for doing what Toni Morrison accuses "white" writers of doing; "the white writer throughout American literary history has used the story of the 'Africanist presence,' a black person as bound and/or rejected, to reflect on humanity, specifically the risky venture of exploring 'one's own body in the guise of sexuality, vulnerability, and anarchy of the other'" (53). Kerouac followed Whitman, Thomas Wolfe, and Jack London's tradition of American Romanticism. He wanted to see the beauty of the land and its people and all that it has to offer. Although ambivalent about his role as a recorder of true experience, his newly acquired racial identity of 'white,' led Kerouac to write passages such as this from *On the Road*:

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver coloured section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night...I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap,

anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. . . . I passed the dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there, occasionally the dusky knee of some mysterious sensual gal; and the dark faces of the men behind rose arbours. (169–70)

Kerouac was in search of finding a place for himself, but throughout his many travels, he always took on the role of an outsider. He thought that these oppressed peoples had a lust for life and contentment with their own identity that he never had. For Kerouac, being "white" was something he had never experienced growing up, but it was something that he always strived for. It offered a privilege that he believed would grant him all the success in the world, but at the same time he felt "disillusioned" because that "white" experience for Kerouac was an illusion. It was nothing like what was written about in the Thomas Wolfe novels he loved so dearly. Kerouac was so blinded by his own sense of wanting to belong and be accepted that he could not clearly see how hard life was for the racialized minorities of America. Wanting to be another race for Kerouac was a way of denying the imposed identity of "White" onto him. In the essay, "White," Richard Dyer discusses this feeling of disillusionment: "when whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death" (44). Kerouac sees this in whiteness and in contrast sees life and purpose in people of color. It is Kerouac's battle with his imposed identity of "white" and his ethnicity as French Canadian that fuels his writing for the downtrodden people.

Kerouac traveled the Americas from Canada to South America in search of finding the soul of America, and in order to do this he chose to travel the back roads of dusty towns and hang out with the hobos and manual workers of America. In searching for an authentic American voice, he saw these people as the “true heirs of American freedom” (Holton 90) and himself as their chronicler. It was also a way of cataloguing every aspect of his life, not so much as autobiography but something more. Kerouac wanted to capture the moment as it occurs and did not want to rely on fictionalized scenes to tell his story, but rather “he conceived the idea of creating an experimental novel in which he could use all of the numerous facets of his imagination and, beneath it all, utilize ‘actual experience’ as a ‘screen’ to make the ‘shadows dance’” (Maher 18).

Kerouac Becomes Beat

When Kerouac and Ginsberg decided they needed to create their own literary movement that would change the world, Kerouac believed the movement should be writing for the working class, the drifter, and the outsider that Kerouac felt he was. To be truly authentic in voice and experience Kerouac befriended many outlaw figures and took to becoming involved in the underworld. Throughout his journey he found likeminded souls that were on the same path, such as disillusioned intellectuals and burgeoning artists looking to tell their own stories that were not about the doldrums of high society, but the howling hipsters of the streets. It was through his affiliations with these people that Kerouac would first hear the word “Beat” used in the way that would

encompass an entire group of people. It was a Times Square hustler named Herbert Huncke who Kerouac first heard use the word on the street corners of Times Square in various different fashions. In his essay "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," Kerouac explains the term "beat" he took from Huncke,

a vision gleaned from the way we had heard the word "beat" spoken on streetcorners on Times Square and in the Village, in other cities in the downtown city night of postwar America--beat, meaning down and out but full of intense conviction...We had our mystic heroes and wrote, nay sung novels about them, erected long poems celebrating the new "angels" of the American underground. (48)

Those songs for the "new 'angels' of the American underground" became a key tenet for Beat poetry. The Beats began to write about the hard times of their own lives, and they chose to do this in the spoken lingo of the times. In Kerouac's case it was the street lingo of the late 1940s and 50s, but for Kerouac it was not good enough to simply mimic the language of the people of the streets. He felt that in order to best write about the real America he had to be a part of it. Kerouac never wrote about the despair of upper class living or the disillusionment of the leisure class because he never experienced that life. Kerouac grew up the son of a small town newspaper printer and had to work his way through college. He never saw that lifestyle as something he hoped to achieve. Kerouac was interested in telling the story of America's unsung heroes, and in his poem, "Skid Row Wine," he lays out his that philosophy:

could a done a lot worse than sit
In Skid Row drinkin wine

To know that nothing matters after all
To know there's no real difference
between the rich and the poor
To know that eternity is neither drunk
nor sober, to know it young
and be a poet (Kerouac, *Poems* 156).

“Skid Row Wine” speaks to the role of the poet finding poetry in the least likely of places like the dark alleyways with drunken homeless people. It also speaks to writing about being a part of that world, which speaks to being beat down but not defeated. The unbreakable spirit that Kerouac touts is a sense that no matter how harsh the world seems, one can still find beauty and faith in simple things like poetry and friendship.

Part II: The Ginsberg Everybody Knew But No One Talks About: Ginsberg As A Communist/Socialist Jewish Middle Class Kid And Champion For The Underclasses

In the Jewish community, Ginsberg has not been taken seriously as a Jewish poet because of his primarily secular poetry. Allen Grossman in his article, “Allen Ginsberg: The Jew As An American Poet,” criticizes Ginsberg for not being Jewish enough when he writes, “His earliest poems (reprinted as

Empty Mirror, Totem Press, 1961) are culturally anonymous...*Kaddish*, is presented under an aggressively Jewish title despite the fact that it is in no simple sense a Jewish book" (303). This cultural anonymity is something that Ginsberg shared with Kerouac, who was also in his youth trying to fit into a "white" identity. However much of Ginsberg's work never fell in line with the "proper" literature of any genre, ethnic or not; he resisted categorization. In his poem, "Yiddish Kopf," Ginsberg defends his Judaism; "I'm Jewish because love my family matzoh ball soup. / I'm Jewish because my fathers mothers uncles grandmothers said 'Jewish,' all the way back to Vitebsk & Kaminitz-Podolska via Lvov" (*Collected Poems* 1013). To Allen Ginsberg, being Jewish was cultural, it was his ethnic identity, and was not wrapped up in going to Temple or abiding by orthodox doctrine. When discussing Ginsberg's Jewishness, much of the debate goes to his long poem about his mother, *Kaddish*. The term "Kaddish" is a Jewish prayer read for the dead, usually at a wake, much like a eulogy. There are also references to "Howl's" technique being modeled on Jewish poetics, but Ginsberg's Judaism is present in his connection to his culture through his family. In *Contemporary Jewish-American Dramatist and Poets: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, Maria Damon devotes a chapter to Allen Ginsberg where she writes, "'Jewishness' for Ginsberg seems to mean, to a large degree, 'family'" (259). Family is a critical part of being Jewish for Ginsberg and that extended for him to his family of outcasts. Ginsberg was well known for having a large circle of friends that he cared for immensely. Ginsberg was often a "caring uncle" to those that knew him and would go out of his way to help his friends in any way

he could, almost to a fault. He had a tendency to fight for his friends and for his own views on the world. He was truly outspoken for both himself and his friends. Ginsberg's unwillingness to fit into any particular box outlined by critics and academics comes from his upbringing and his association with outsider characters like Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, and Herbert Huncke.

As a child, Ginsberg had to contend with a Socialist father and a Communist mother. Louis and Naomi Ginsberg were both culturally Jewish but fiercely political and "Louis and Naomi, as Socialists, raised their children with no religion. Allen was not bar-mitzvahed and was not taught Hebrew" (Miles, *Ginsberg* 13). Allen grew up in a highly political household and religion was always second fiddle to the plight of the workingman. Culturally, however, Louis and Naomi followed certain traditions such as giving Allen the Hebrew name Israel Abraham. Naomi was also active in the Yiddish branches of the Communist Party in Paterson, New Jersey and sung Yiddish songs at home (see Damon's essay "Allen Ginsberg"). For Louis, who maintained a steady job as a public school teacher, assimilation and staying low-key about his Jewishness was a way of keeping his family safe. Although Louis was a staunch Socialist, he still did not want to bring any more scrutiny on his family. Safety was always an issue for Louis and many Jewish people in America because of the tumultuous history of Jews in America.

In many ways, Jews had as complicated a history as French Canadians in America because of their distinct cultural and language differences. The Jewish

people spoke the Yiddish language in their homes and many older Jewish people held onto the language as a symbol of their heritage. The biggest migration of Jewish families took place in the late 19th and early 20th century and was in response to the growing anti-Semitism in Europe and Russia. Naomi (Ginsberg) Levy's family were Russian Jews who fled to America to escape the pogroms of the Russian government. [Pogroms were state-sponsored massacres conducted to eliminate the Jewish population in relation for the assassination of Alexander II.] Many of these Jewish refugees fled to America and settled there bringing with them a staunch support of Communism. On the other hand, Louis Ginsberg's family came from Lvov, Galicia, which was on the Czechoslovakian border and lived between Kiev and Warsaw until they migrated to the United States in the 1870s and settled in Newark. Louis Ginsberg's family was staunchly Socialist, being members of the Yiddish Arbeiter Ring (Workman's Circle). (See Miles' *Ginsberg*) Louis Ginsberg took politics to heart so much that he named his first son, Eugene after Eugene Debs. Throughout his life, whenever religion was brought, Louis was "best described as agnostic" (B. Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself* 5). To the Ginsberg's politics was the family religion. Both Naomi and Louis held strong political allegiances that often caused clashes between the two of them and their families.

Although the Ginsbergs were considered middle-class and had a modest income where they seemed to live comfortably, Louis still had to get a scholarship to attend Rutgers University and gain his teaching degree. Naomi also took to teaching for a short while until her mental illness became more

pronounced and much of the Ginsbergs' finances went to paying her psychiatric bills. Mental illness would be a constant theme throughout Allen's life and work and in many ways would shape how he accomplished much in his life. It would be a neurosis for Ginsberg, often wondering if he himself was going crazy like his mother, but for Louis and his young family it was a constant stress on their livelihood. Throughout the 1930s, the Ginsbergs moved to smaller and more modest homes because of the Great Depression coupled with the constant medical bills and Naomi's inability to work. The strain on the Ginsbergs led young Allen to have to attend rougher schools. Although they never left Paterson, New Jersey, they had to go farther and farther into the "ghettoes" of Paterson. For young Allen, this was a shock because many of the schools he had been attending were highly populated with other Jewish children.

In 1937, Allen started in a new school, which was "more" racially integrated but because of this there was more racism and prejudice from the other children. In his journal, Ginsberg would write that this school was filled with "sadistic Dutch men, fights with mad mean dirty Negroes and abusive morons" (B. Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself* 24). Allen would get picked on constantly and the other students would call him "Ginsbug, Ginsbun, and Jewbun" (24). Things even got so bad that Ginsberg actually got into a schoolyard fight and even though he was able to hold his ground, he was deeply scarred by that incident. In his poem, "Garden State," Ginsberg would write about this incident:

I was afraid to talk to anyone

in Paterson, lest my sensitivity
to sex, music, the universe, be discovered &
I be laughed at, hit by colored boys

“Mr. Professor” said the Dutchman
on Haledon Ave. “Stinky Jew” said
my friend black Joe, kinky haired.

Oldsmobiles past by in front of my eyeglasses. (*Collected Poems* 726)

This moment of prejudice shaped Ginsberg in more ways than making him aware of the cruelties of racism in America; it spurred him to want to change the world as he saw it. In a second encounter with a bully, Ginsberg decided to use words instead of his fists to stop a boy from punching him square in the face. Ginsberg let out a slew of words that caught the boy off guard and stopped his attack on Ginsberg (See Miles). In his essay, “My Son the Poet,” Louis Ginsberg would write how Allen came to him after the incident and told him about how astonished he was by the turn of events. “He wondered what Allen meant,” Louis Ginsberg writes, “and in his wonderment the bully forgot his punitive intent and asked Allen what he had said. They began to talk and the threat was over. I believe that my son then felt the power of words” (Miles 18).

However, it would also be through words that Ginsberg would learn the dangers of using them against injustice and racism. In probably one of the most famous incidents from Beat Generation history is the incident with the cleaning woman who refused to clean Ginsberg’s dormitory room. Ginsberg believed

that the woman would not clean his room because he was Jewish, so he wrote the words, "Fuck the Jews!" and "Butler Has No Balls!" (Butler is a reference to Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia) on his dormitory window so that she would not miss that. Unfortunately, the practical joke backfired on Ginsberg and the cleaning woman went and told the Dean, which led to the first of Allen's offenses against Columbia University and eventually his suspension. This act, which Ginsberg deeply believed was an act of anti-Semitism, stayed with him for the rest of his life, even twenty years after the fact. Ginsberg would write that the cleaning woman was a "real grumpy old freak who read Westbrook Pegler and took *Daily News* editorials for Bible" (B. Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself* 64). Ginsberg would continue to fight injustice through his words even if it caused him to get deeper into trouble with the authorities.

Words would become Allen Ginsberg's greatest tool in the fight against oppression and violence, but words were not something that came easily to him. Ginsberg would have to hone his skill of talking and staying calm that would lead Norman Mailer to call him "the bravest man in America" (B. Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy* 2). With the discovery of the power of words and his father's influence as a poet, Ginsberg saw how poetry might be a powerful tool in the fight against injustice. Louis Ginsberg had been a decently published lyrical poet, and during his youth had been in the same circles as Louis Untermeyer, Marianne Moore, Maxwell Bodenheim, Edward Arlington Robinson, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Although Louis did not achieve the same level of recognition as the other poets in the Greenwich Village circle, he constantly wrote

throughout his lifetime. Because of his home situation and his job as a public school teacher, Louis could not devote as much time and energy to his poetry as he would have liked, but Allen remembered his father “wrote poems under a metal-shaded lamp” late into the night (Miles 22). Poetry and ideas were always a part of the Ginsberg household, and they became the sole purpose of Allen’s life and for the Beat Generation.

Red Words Blue Words: Allen Ginsberg’s Communist And Socialist Influence

Some of Allen’s first memories were of his parents arguing over Socialist and Communist ideals. The different ideologies often led to heated arguments between Louis and Naomi Ginsberg. It was this environment that led Allen to always have a favorable view of alternative forms of governance, rather than blindly accepting a capitalistic democracy. In his poem, “America,” Allen Ginsberg recalls his childhood going to Communist meetings with his mother:

America when I was seven momma took me to Communist Cell meetings
 they sold us garbanzos a handful per ticket a ticket costs a nickel
 and the speeches were free everybody was angelic and sentimental
 about the workers it was all so sincere you have no idea what a
 good thing the party was in 1835 Scott Nearing was a grand old
 man a real mensch Mother Bloor the Silk-strikers’ Ewig-Weibliche
 made me cry. I once was the Yiddish orator Israel Amter plain.
 Everybody must have been a spy. (*Collected Poems* 155)

Communism to Ginsberg was part of being in a community of people that wanted to help other less fortunate people. It was this sense of helping people that resonated with young Ginsberg, but it was also a family affair that connected him to his parents forever. Ginsberg spent just as much time with his father and his Socialist political causes as he did with his mother. In 1940, young Allen and Louis became deeply involved in the campaign of Irving Abramson, who was a CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) official running for Congress. Throughout this campaign, young Ginsberg heard his opponent call Abramson a "Red." This infuriated Allen because Abramson was not a Communist but a Socialist. Even at a young age, Ginsberg knew the distinction while most of America still does not. Just as backyard barbeques and baseball games were a part of growing up for most Americans, going to Communist meetings and being part of political campaigns was part of Ginsberg's life. This background and a strong sense of wanting to resolve difficult situations is what led Allen to want to be a labor lawyer and attend Columbia University.

When Allen decided he wanted to attend Columbia, he vowed that if he got in he would devote his life to helping the working class. According to Barry Miles, Ginsberg's biographer, this vow "gave direction to Ginsberg's activities over the years, and he used it as a benchmark whenever he was confused by a choice of action" (32). Defending the working classes is something that was second nature for Ginsberg, but Ginsberg did not truly understand the difficulties of navigating the United States legal system. When Ginsberg entered

Columbia University, he was only seventeen years old and vastly inexperienced with the world of the working class and the underworld. Upon arriving at Columbia, Ginsberg soon realized that he came from a family of modest means because “he seemed shabbily dressed in comparison to his classmates” (Schumacher 24). Ginsberg was part of a new crowd of students that were accepted with financial assistance and in Allen’s case it was a scholarship of \$100 a semester (See B. Morgan *I Celebrate Myself*). Ginsberg, like Kerouac, had to work part-time while attending classes and this put him in a distinctly different class than the other students, so Ginsberg tried to focus on his studies to succeed at this Ivy League game. When studies weren’t enough and his attentions were turning more and more toward literature, his attention began to drift to a crowd of outsiders like himself. It was during his second year at Columbia that he met the people who would become his lifelong friends, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr, and Joan Vollmer.

When Ginsberg began to hang out with this crowd he found that they were interested in the seedier parts of New York City, such as Times Square with its hustlers, drugs, and writers, and he realized he wanted the same experiences. The more time he spent with them, the more he realized his dream of being a labor lawyer was mostly a romantic flight of fancy. In *Kaddish*, Ginsberg expresses his misgivings about being a lawyer: “by being honest revolutionary labor lawyer—would train for that—inspired by Sacco Vanzetti, Norman Thomas, Debs, Altgeld, Sandburg, Poe—Little Blue Books. I wanted to be President, Senator. / ignorant woe” (*Collected Poems* 222). Because of

Kerouac, Carr, and Burroughs, he realized that he could never really be part of the labor law world. Kerouac would constantly tease him about never having drunk with working class men in working class bars and Ginsberg would blush and have to admit that Kerouac was right. “What do you know about either labor or law?” Kerouac would ask Ginsberg and then would tell him, “Better go and be a poet, you’re too sensitive” (B. Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself* 47). After a year and a half of being a law student, Ginsberg would switch to English literature and pursue his career of being a poet. Even though he gave up being a labor lawyer, he never lost the ambition for helping people. Instead of using the law, Ginsberg would use poetry to speak back against injustice and to help change the world for the better as he saw it.

Throughout Ginsberg’s poetry, there is always a strain of writing Beat poetry for the working classes, for the oppressed, and for the outsider in America and all over the world. In one of his earlier poems, “A Poem on America,” Ginsberg would convey the America he was writing for:

The alleys, the dye works,
Mill Street in the smoke,
melancholy of the bars,
the sadness of long highways,
negroes climbing around
the rusted iron by the river,
the bathing pool hidden
behind the silk factory

fed by its drainage pipes;

all the pictures we carry in our mind (*Collected Poems* 72).

Ginsberg maintained this ideal of writing for the underclasses of the world throughout his work from “Howl” to “America” to “Grandma Earth’s Song.” Allen Ginsberg built his career on writing about the downtrodden of the world by oppressive forces throughout society, but it was his determination that anyone can be a poet that helped transform writing poetry for the underclasses to his dedication in creating a new class of poets that were part of the underclasses.

Allen Ginsberg was essential to the Beat Generation in creating a cast of poets that numbered in the hundreds, and because he employed the idea the Beat philosophy was a living entity that was to grow and change with every new poet, Ginsberg laid the groundwork for the creation of the Beat Movement. New poets would lead and redefine writing Beat poetry for the underclasses to writing from the underclasses. Ginsberg did this by being able to operate as a “white man,” but his Jewish and Socialist/Communist background helped him be a voice for the underclasses. According to Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, in his article, “Multicultural Judaism?” Allen Ginsberg “never let go of his Jewish identity, which remained somewhere near the core of his being. That fact was reinforced by his continuing to live on Manhattan’s Lower East Side” (75).

Ginsberg tried to stay close to the world he wished to speak for, so even when he sold his papers for 1.5 million dollars to Stanford University, he chose to buy the apartment he had been living in for years and stay there until his death. It

might well have been his Jewish culture or his socialist/communist upbringing that led him to the conclusion that the only way to continue to stay true to the fight for the underprivileged is to remain a part of it or it might have been his nature, but it is certain that his example and his work perpetuated the Beat philosophy and helped it become the Beat Movement with poets and activists like Bob Kaufman and Raúl Salinas.

The Beat Movement: Writing From The Underclasses

The Beat Movement began as part of the Beat Generation, but became its own movement in the late 1960s until today. Most regard the Beat Generation as friends of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, but when Kerouac died in 1969, the core definition of the Beat Generation died with him. The Beat Movement, which Ginsberg was still a part of, had different leaders and stronger political and social activism in its philosophy. What makes the Beat Movement unique in writing about being Beat Down is that people like Bob Kaufman, Diana di Prima, Hettie Jones, and to some extent Raúl Salinas led the Beat Movement. "Granted, white male Beats outnumbered African American and women Beats," Jeffrey Falla writes, "yet such commonplace, conclusive assertions that the Beats were non- or anti-political, completely disregard Beats such as Kaufman, Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, and Ted Joans each of whose poems clearly involve political engagements of racial issues" (185).

They took the reins of what was begun in the late 1940s and 50s and created a movement that was no longer looking for big New York presses to

publish them, but began creating their own magazines and small presses. The greatest success of this movement was City Lights Books, which is still in operation today. The Beat Movement took the underlying elements that Beat Generation had set down and started to put them into practice. The Beat Movement had at its core a change of approach with the work of Bob Kaufman, who was a contemporary of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Corso. What Kaufman brought to the table was an outsider perspective that Kerouac and Ginsberg could not have. Kaufman brought with him his African American Jewish New Orleans socialist ideals. Because of Bob Kaufman and his work, years later Raúl Salinas would pick up and his charge and add his own blend of Xicanindio activism into the Beat Movement.

Part III: Singing About Golden Sardines With His Cranial Guitar: Bob Kaufman Writing From The Underclasses

When Herb Caen coined the term “beatnik” in April of 1958, it was Bob Kaufman he had in mind. Kaufman was the fringe character that embodied what being Beat was all about. Jerry Kamastra, friend and fellow writer, once said of Kaufman; “He was in the news all the time for being busted. He used to run up and down Grant Avenue jumping on cars and shouting poetry” (Kaufman, *Cranial Guitar* 7). Bob Kaufman was many things throughout his lifetime, a merchant marine, a union organizer, and editor of *Beatitude* magazine—but what he is best known as a crazy Beat poet from the San Francisco scene and father of the Beat Movement. What separated the Beat

Generation from the Beat Movement was a location and a focus that was more political and performative. Kaufman took to the streets and performed his poetry to people on North Beach. Much of Kaufman's poetry was never written down and what was written down was compiled into three books: *Golden Sardine*, *Solititudes Crowded with Loneliness*, and *The Ancient Rain*. Kaufman was a constant organizer of poetry readings in North Beach and was seen as the center of the San Francisco Beat Scene. What made Kaufman unique were several things, such as his spontaneity, his penchant for getting arrested and into trouble, his mythical history, and his racial and cultural liminal space.

Bob Kaufman was born to a half-African, half-Jewish father who worked as a Pullman porter for the railroads and a black Martinique schoolteacher mother from Vignes. He was raised in mostly a Black working-class family, but from a young age he had a strong love for reading. George Kaufman, Bob's brother, once said, "We always had tremendous shelves of books all over the house. Possibly this may have been the genesis of Bob's work, from reading at such a young age" (Kaufman, *Cranial Guitar* 8). Like Kerouac and Ginsberg, Kaufman grew up with a respect for literature and its transformative power and also like them, Kaufman was part of the working-class world. Throughout his lifetime he would suffer several physical encounters with racism and authority. These attacks would bleed through into his poetry and fuel his conviction for speaking to suffering. In "Unmeaning Jargon/Uncanonized Beatitude: Bob Kaufman, Poet," Maria Damon writes that "at thirteen he was hung by his thumbs in an icehouse all night by a lynch mob; in his active days he was

arrested thirty-five times in a year and a half, and in 1963 he was arrested for walking on the grass in Washington Square Park, given between fifty and one hundred shock treatments, and threatened with a lobotomy" (717). In many ways, Kaufman was the essence of Beat in regards to writing about the underclasses of America from the position of having experienced the hand of oppression.

Kaufman wrote from the oppressed peoples' point of view and chose to use his poetry as a vehicle to speak for those who grew up under terrible conditions and still continue to survive. Kaufman never achieved financial success and never championed the "American Dream" as a salvation for the poor and the outlaw; instead he offered a social critique and a Beat sensibility that was about finding peace within and not in material possessions. Kaufman called this dream "Abomunism" and in his poem, "Abomunist Manifesto," he writes, "ABOMUNISTS DO NOT WRITE FOR MONEY; THEY WRITE / THE MONEY ITSELF" (*Cranial Guitar* 117). Kaufman lived off of the kindness of friends and the hard work of his wife, Eileen Kaufman, but that did not stop him from being involved in the Beat scene and organizing poetry readings. What Kaufman brought to the Beat table was a dedication to the actual physical act of poetry mixed with a deep-seated desire to speak back to the racism that he experienced throughout his lifetime. He was a character unto himself and imbibing the words of the Beat Generation into his own life led him to change the Beat Generation into something different. He created a Beat Movement that has a strong political vibe and consists of a multicultural group of artists that

take up the Beat banner, but that is distinctly their own. In his essay, "Between Black, Brown & Beige: Latino Poets and the Legacy of Bob Kaufman," Hernandez objects to the view that Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Corso were key architects in the Beat Movement. Hernandez claims Kaufman was the key architect for the Beat Movement:

Kaufman epitomized the rebellion against conformity and the poetic adaptation of jazz championed by Kerouac, Ginsberg, and the other Beats. He was the most political, having been a labor activist before turning his protests into poetry on such subjects as the execution of Caryl Chessman by the State of California; he was the most improvisational, famous for his spontaneous readings on the streets of North Beach and at the Co-Existence Bagel Shop (which led to numerous confrontations with police and stays in jail); and he was the most musical, a native of New Orleans steeped in the culture of jazz. (191)

Bob Kaufman created a space for being Beat that could not have existed if not for Kaufman's unique presence. Although he was political and socially conscious, he did not find a place for himself in the Harlem Renaissance or the Black Arts Movement. He did not find a space because he felt he was made of more than just his African heritage. The Beats offered a space where he could live and even change the movement toward something that spoke for people like him, liminal societal being. Kaufman was always between worlds, with his Jewish heritage, his New Orleans African American upbringing, and his indigenous roots.

When Leroi Jones became Amiri Baraka, it was a great step toward becoming a more socially conscious black man, but for Baraka it required turning his back on the Beats and becoming solely a part of the Black Arts Movement. That is something that Kaufman could not do; he needed to be on the fringes of society: “thus while Baraka moved from bohemian abstraction towards didacticism and direct action, Kaufman always remained in the impossible realms of poetic imagination, inviting us to listen to his freedom dreams” (Lybeer 348). His dreams were less about racial solidarity and more about cultural co-existence. Throughout the mythological history of Bob Kaufman, there are several stories of his mixed-cultural heritage from his “mother as a Martinique Catholic who practiced voodoo” (Lybeer 337) to his Black-Jewish heritage and his life as merchant seamen traveling the world experiencing various different cultures. Kaufman always operated best as a mysterious figure that no one could ever really grasp, but at the same time people were drawn to him because of the unique space he could occupy. Although Kaufman was not “white” by any means, he shared a mixed culture that allowed him to move from community to community like Kerouac and Ginsberg.

According to Kathryn Lindberg, if there was one thing that readily identified Bob Kaufman it was resistance: “Kaufman surely resisted the fixed identities (beat, African American/Black/Negro, Brown man, Jew, Native American, jazz man, merchant marine, loser by several measures) to which he had almost legitimate claims. Kaufman sometimes exercised such claims—if

only long enough to empty out these categories by which bourgeois individuals measure Self and Other” (Lindberg 168). Bob Kaufman could walk between these worlds and be able to write poetry that would subvert the assumption that he had to write his skin color. Because of Kaufman’s mysterious image, some thought him to be white. Fellow African American Beat poet Ted Joans made that mistake before he actually met him. In an interview with Joans, he spoke of his first encounter with Bob Kaufman:

The cat knocked on the door and I opened the door and there was a black cat standing there with a chick who has a little baby. I said, ‘Yes?’ ‘Allen [Ginsberg] told me I could come over and stay at your pad.’ I said, ‘No, I don’t know, man; what’s your name?’ ‘My name is Bob, man.’ ‘Bob who?’... ‘Bob Kaufman , the poet.’ I said, ‘I thought you were white, man.’” (Kaufman, *Cranial Guitar* 14).

While he often wrote about the African American condition, his poetry was wrapped up so much in surrealism that it blurred any racial distinction on the page. Even fellow African American poets could not tell until they laid eyes on Kaufman that he was indeed Black. This confusion is something that Kaufman thrived on because he didn’t want his race to define everything about him. As Lindberg writes, “By de-definition, rather than simple reversal which might repeat the mirror-effect and the dialectic of master and slave, Kaufman subverts the binary logic of black and white” (176). He breaks from the common assumptions and creates a new space: a Beat space. His unwillingness to be pegged down as one particular thing allowed him to draw from all of these

around him—race, culture, and political ideology, and produce a poetry that was unique and inspirational for other Beat poets.

Abomunist Poetics: The Poetry Of Bob Kaufman

The poetry of Bob Kaufman is the backbone of Beat Movement poetics. Kaufman's poetry is a mixture of political protest, social commentary, and surrealist imagery. His is a voice that is spoken on the page as well as composed on the tongue. Kaufman himself was well versed in many forms of poetry from the Romantics to Walt Whitman, but it was Federico Garcia Lorca that he loved best. In his poem, "Ancient Rain," Kaufman lays out his reasoning for writing poetry about social injustice as influenced by the works of Lorca. "Federico Garcia Lorca sky," Kaufman writes, "immaculate scoured sky, equaling only itself, contained all the distances that Lorca is, that he came from Spain of the Inquisition is no surprise" (*Cranial Guitar* 138-39). Lorca gave him the sense of being able to use poetry to speak out against the injustices of the world and yet still produce beauty through words. Kaufman even styled some of his poems after Lorca; poems like "The Late Lamented Wind, Burned in Indignation," "I Sign a Marbled Sigh Ah, at Last..." and "All Those Ships That Never Sailed" and even wrote a poem called, "Lorca." Although Kaufman borrows certain poetic licenses from Lorca, Kaufman has a unique style that mixes his own cultures with his streetwise experiences. What Kaufman offered was a bridge between the various parts of his life like jazz, traditional European poetics, and the Black spiritual sermon. Kaufman often mixed street-talk with poetic devices

and placed them within jazz riffs and surrealist images. His style made him more accessible to people who would not normally read or listen to poetry.

Poems such as “Round about Midnight,” would blend all three:

Jazz radio on a midnight kick,
Round about Midnight,

Sitting on the bed,
With a jazz type chick
Round about Midnight

Piano laughter, in my ears,
Round about Midnight. (*Cranial Guitar* 59)

This poem uses the traditional rhyme and metered approach to poetry with a repeating closing line, but at the same time he is using street-talk with words like “kick,” and “chick,” but at the same time carrying a jazzy rhythm. Maria Damon writes that this is something that is quintessential Bob Kaufman because

[A]lthough Kaufman writes in standard English laden with allusions to Camus, Picasso, and Miró, he employs a street language, black American verbal structures—“rapping, running it down, and signifying”—and jazz modalities in his verse. A quintessential subcultural poet, Kaufman is at once multiply marginal and properly paradigmatic; embodying the mainstream trends and stereotypes of his era, his work is at once high-cultural and streetwise. (Damon 705-706)

This blending of styles led him to the Beat Generation and its proclamation that it was doing the same work as Kaufman was doing. The Beats offered an emphasis on orality, jazz, and inclusiveness that was not available anywhere else for Kaufman. When Kaufman became a part of this group he found a place for his own poetry. It was a place in-between different poetics and different ideas. “A bridge—is indeed the best metaphor one could use to describe...Kaufman’s poetics as a whole,” Edward Lybeer writes, “a bridge between the Old and New Worlds, between the blackness of the blues and the whiteness of Euro-American modernism, between orality and textuality” (351).

Bridging is one way to describe Kaufman’s poetics, but a more accurate description may be that his poetry was an interzone for race, culture, musicality, and performance. Kaufman’s poetics were designed to be both read on the page and also to be performed and it was through performing of his poetry that Kaufman garnered his recognition as a poet and activist. Kaufman usually came up with his poems on the spot at poetry readings and then wrote them down later. Spontaneity was Kaufman’s strong suit; it was something he borrowed from jazz and surrealism and one thing he reinforced about being a Beat poet. David Henderson in his introduction to Kaufman’s *Collected Works* writes, “Kaufman was really into being a quintessential Beat who cared nothing for publication and who cared everything about spontaneity—about literal beatitude” (*Cranial Guitar* 11). This is not to say that Kaufman was not interested in publication; he helped found and edit *Beatitude* magazine. He spent many hours physically making each copy of the issues, but Kaufman had

no desire for publication in major New York presses and this is what set him apart from Kerouac. Kaufman was too political and antagonistic with the establishment to want to be published by these houses, which he viewed as the enemy of free thought. Nate Mackey, professor at University of California, Santa Cruz, who would bring Kaufman out to read, said of him:

There was a part of him that certainly resisted careerist moves. He wasn't somebody trying to ensure his place in the Norton Poetry Anthology or trying to make sure he got onto the syllabi of poetry courses in universities...The thing that he's remembered and revered as is as a street poet, and that's diametrically opposed to the kinds of institutionalizations of the poet. (qtd. in *Cranial Guitar* 24-25)

Institutionalization was something that Kaufman never wanted for himself or his poetry and certainly his activism and political stance against oppression didn't allow him to be a part of that world.

The Inbetween Brother: Kaufman's Street Poetry And His Influence On The Beat Movement

Horace Coleman, an African American veteran of the Vietnam War and a poet who struggled to find his place in the world of Poetry did not quite fit into the categories that were laid out for him because he did not believe in rigid identity categories or only writing from particular experiences. Coleman had his own experiences that didn't seem to fit into other literary groups. He found himself lost until he came upon the writings of Bob Kaufman. Coleman writes,

“Kaufman was confirmation that you could write, be black in the way you were and write as life and your mind moved you. I don't know what demons choked him but I can imagine some of them. The spirit of the Beat Movement flowed in him and his words. Freedom, individuality, creativity, political awareness. And speech the way people spoke it. That'll do for an epitaph and a legacy”

(Coleman 221). This is the legacy that Kaufman left for the Beat Movement and the poets that continue the movement. Above anything else, Kaufman is able to reach the poor and working class people of disenfranchised generations and infuse a sense of responsibility for the society they live in. Kaufman made the Beat Movement about being political and using poetry as a form of activism and resistance. By taking the common elements of Beat poetry of speaking from streets and proclaiming that anyone can be a poet, he took the philosophy of the Beat Generation a step further and made it social activism against racism, classism, and oppression.

In his poem, “A Terror Is More Certain...,” Kaufman writes I “never realize how bad my writing is because i am poor & symbolize myself” (*Cranial Guitar* 45). This line makes a statement against academic poetry, but also against the establishment that at the time was not taking street poetry seriously. By saying that he never realizes how bad his poetry is because he is poor and symbolizes himself, he is taking a very antagonistic stance against the detractors of the Beat Movement who wrote that the Beats were “know-nothing bohemians,” and were “the cult of unthink” (B. Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy* xiv). This was an active campaign to delegitimize the Beats because they

favored poetry readings in bars and coffee shops as opposed to libraries and universities. Since many of the Beat poets came from poor or modest backgrounds and spoke for the poor and the outcast, they often wrote their poems in the 1st Person point of view and infused themselves into their poetry. They spoke plainly in free verse, but most importantly, these poets were becoming political. In America, there is still a large following of poets that believe that poetry should not be political. Bob Kaufman is not one of these poets and the movement he inspires actively tries to promote social consciousness, which is frightening to a society that does not want its ivy towers shaken.

Jerry Stoll, friend of Kaufman's, said of Kaufman, "Bob was talking about activism. He was functioning as a critic of society in a much more social and political way than any of the other poets in North Beach were. He was a pioneer" (qtd. in *Cranial Guitar* 9). For Kaufman, his own life was his greatest source of material for his poetry and his activism. Several of his poems take elements from his own life, in Beat fashion, and use these incidents to promote his agenda against the current American mainstream. In his article, "'Remembering When Indians Were Red': Bob Kaufman, the Popular Front, and the Black Arts Movement," James Smethurst believes that "Kaufman experienced life, or recreated his life, as a sort of symbolic field in which his work was not clearly distinguished from 'real life'" (Smethurst 147). This move is what made him Beat but also what attracted others who would not have thought about being poets to this Beat Movement. It was his writing that

allowed for various people from all walks of life to feel that they could also be a part of this movement. Kaufman, because of his social liminal status, was able to be all things and still be his own unique self. If there is one thing that can be said of Kaufman it is that he did not believe in rigid definitions and “Kaufman’s heterogeneous verse is that of the ultimate outsider, standing outside narrow ideological confines and notions of racial ‘purity’ or authenticity” (Lybeer 348).

One element in particular that Kaufman brought to the Beat Movement in a way that poets like Gregory Corso and Herbert Huncke could not was an appeal to prisoners and particularly prisoners of color. Kaufman spent so much time being “hassled by the man” that he understood the desolation of being imprisoned. In “Jail Poems,” Kaufman writes, “I am sitting in a cell with a view of evil parallels, / Waiting thunder to splinter me into a thousand me’s. / It is not enough to be in one cage with one self; / I want to sit opposite every prisoner in every hole” (*Callaloo* 117). This poem is one example of how Kaufman reaches out to the prisoners of the world and gains a sense of responsibility for these prisoners. According to the American authorities of the time, Kaufman was a criminal and was often targeted as a subversive agent.

In an incident witnessed by fellow poet Paul Landry, a police officer came into the Coexistence Bagel Shop and ripped some poetry off of the walls because he deemed it obscene. “Bob just stood up,” Landry recalls, “and pissed on the guy’s pants. He was talking to him, and while he was talking to him he took it out and peed on the guy...And from what I understand they ‘iceboxed’ him for about a month” (qtd. in *Cranial Guitar* 13). “Iceboxing” is a technique used by

the police as a way of keeping someone in jail without actually having something to hold them on. The technique refers to moving someone from jail to jail so that no one knows where he is and can't post bail. This technique did not deter Kaufman or his supporters because outside of the North Beach Police Station there would always be a can that was labeled "Bob Kaufman Can," and people would put in whatever money they had for his bail.

Bob Kaufman never became famous in the mainstream. He never had a book published by a mainstream New York house, but he was extremely influential in keeping the poetry scene alive in North Beach, in New York, and everywhere else he went. Lynn Wildey, roommate and fellow poet of Kaufman said, "Bob kept it going. He always had something moving, so the consciousness would be acute—but he kept the beat, the rhythm" (qtd. in *Cranial Guitar* 26). Because of his constant movement, he influenced many people; specifically he influenced prisoners and outlaw figures. The constant harassment by the police and the stints in jail caught the attention of several prisoners and his poetry for prisoners led others to start to pick up their pens and write. One of these prisoners was Raúl Salinas, who would go on to become a formidable poet and activist supporting prisoner rights and Native American rights, as well as to become a prominent Chicano activist.

Part IV: La Resistencia: Raúl R. Salinas, Xicanindio Beat Poet

If you travel down to W. Annie and 1st Street in Austin, you will find a converted house that is now a small bookstore on the corner. Out front you will

see the words “La Resistencia” painted on the front, but no other markers to tell you that this is a place of business. As unsuspecting as this little bookstore is, La Resistencia has been the center of political activism for over twenty-seven years. Founded on the belief that poetry and the arts can have a transformative effect on someone’s life, La Resistencia is a space for change. Located deep in South Austin, this bookstore has stood for the promotion of Native, Chicano, Mexicano, Latino, African-American, gay and lesbian, feminist literature, Beat literature, as well as a center to help promote social justice. The city of Austin is quickly becoming gentrified replacing small bookstores with Barnes & Noble, but amongst this mass erasure la Resistencia still thrives. Much of the reason for its success can be credited to its founder, Raúl Salinas, who never saw Resistencia as simply a bookstore, but a space for resistance.

Raúl Salinas was many things throughout the course of his life: he was a pachuco, a criminal, a prisoner, a poet, a Native rights advocate, and a formidable voice in the Chicano movement. Born in San Antonio and raised in East Austin by a single mother, Raúl Salinas learned early on that life is tough, especially for a Mexicano in the barrio in the 1950s. Salinas grew up amongst gangs on the street and an oppressive public school system, and he never really fit into either. What separated Raúl from others in his barrio was his love for literature. In an interview with Ben Olguín and Louis Mendoza, Salinas said, “I have to credit the initial source for my love of literature and for being a writer to my mother. Also, my grandmother, who died at 96 years of age, wrote in 1917 or 1920 a corrido after my grandfather was jailed for shooting a man at a house

baptism in west Texas” (Salinas & Mendoza 306). From his grandmother to his mother and down to him, Raúl has always understood literature is deeply personal. His mother was the first activist in his life because by the time he entered school, Raúl already knew how to read in both English and Spanish. However being prepared by his mother to enter the institution of the public school system caused many problems for Raúl. “In school,” Salinas remembers, “I was considered a smart kid, but also a little brat. That was one of the earlier contradictions in my life that I could never be put down in the educational system as being a dumb kid because I excelled; yet, I was a troublemaker” (307). It was this troublemaker identity that would lead him to a life of crime.

After being kicked out of school for being a “troublemaker,” Salinas turned to dealing heroin on the street. Ironically it was not heroin that finally got Raúl busted; it was a nickel bag of pot. Five dollars worth of marijuana cost Raúl fifteen years in prison, a prison sentence that would leave Salinas bitter for many years. It was also this conviction that would lead to more arrests and eventually land him in some of the worst prisons in the country, like Marion, Huntsville, and Leavenworth. These maximum-security prisons were known for two things: hardening criminals or chewing them up and killing them. Unfortunately for the U.S. prison system, this was not the case for Raúl Salinas. Fortunately for Raúl Salinas, he was locked up with many of America’s most prolific political prisoners or what he called “organic intellectuals” (Salinas, *Indio Trails* 80). It was from people like George Jackson, Don Oscar Collazo, and Pedro Albizu Campos that Raúl Salinas would gain his education and find his

voice as a poet and activist. According to an informational pamphlet written by the Marion Brothers, political prisoners at Marion Penitentiary:

There are two groups of political prisoners at Marion: those who were active in freedom struggles on the outside and were sent to prison to stop their work and isolate them from friends and community supporters; and those who have been active in fighting for prisoners' rights and were sent to Marion to be broken by the behavior control program. Their sentences have been lengthened, good time taken away and parole illegally denied.

("Stop the Deaths" 3)

The political education that Salinas received helped him turn from petty crime to understanding the systems of oppression that kept him in prison.

When Raúl Salinas was released in 1972 with a new sense of purpose. No longer was Salinas about simply reacting to the oppression of the institutionalized racism, he was speaking back to the oppression and fighting not with drugs, knives, and violence, but with poetry, activism, and a new sense of community. For several years after his release from prison, Salinas was not allowed to go home to Texas, so he spent many years living around the Seattle area, attending the university, and fighting for Native rights. While in prison, Salinas had met several Native Americans who had educated him on colonization and the connections between Mexicanos and Native peoples. He spent many years fighting alongside many Native American activists and becoming a part of the International Indian Treaty Council. Salinas even ended

up serving as a delegate to represent Leonard Peltier at the Human Rights Symposium in Geneva in 1977.

In the mid-1980s, after several years of being exiled from his home of Texas because his parole strictly forbade his return, Raúl Salinas returned to Austin and opened *La Resistencia*. It is at this bookstore that Salinas practiced what he had learned in prison and fighting with the Nisqually peoples to help build a center for social justice and a promotion of the arts for the disenfranchised and oppressed peoples of the world. At this bookstore he would launch his greatest campaign as a poet, performer, and activist.

Cucaracha Beats: The Poetics Of Raúl Salinas

Raúl Salinas used his bookstore for more than just selling books; he used it as a space to promote cultural art in all shapes and sizes. He even incorporated many activist groups into his cause for libertad, but the best way he got his message out globally was through his poetry. Throughout his lifetime, Salinas published three volumes of poetry: *Un Trip Through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursions*, *East of the Freeway*, and *Indio Trails: A Xicano Odyssey Through Indian Country*, and two spoken word CDs: *Beyond the Beaten Path* and *Red Arc: A Call for Liberacion con Salsa y Cool*. With his poetry Salinas would travel around the world and spread his message. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto writes in his introduction to *Un Trip through the Mind Jail* that like Kaufman, “Salinas incorporates into his poetry influences from two distinctly American sources: the music of jazz and the literature of the Beats. Finding close affinities with

Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Jack Kerouac, Salinas is attracted by both their stance and their aesthetic" (8). But what makes Salinas different from even Kaufman is his Chicano and Native influence in his poetry. While Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Kaufman alluded to the struggle of Native peoples, they never really spent much time trying to understand their struggles. Salinas, being exiled in Seattle for ten years after his release from prison connected with the Nisqually peoples and spent plenty of time learning their practices and struggles. This influence takes the Beat Movement in a direction that they had always wanted to go, but could not. Salinas was able to bring all of these influences into poetry in poems such as "Shame on the Shaman," "Chief Bar Blues," and "About Invasion and Conquest."

Salinas' road to political awareness was a bumpy one and it was not until he returned to Austin that he was able to bring his Beat influence, his prison experience, and his Native influence into his poetry. Louis G. Mendoza, one of Salinas' closest friends and critical biographer, wrote that Raúl Salinas came to the Beats at an early age; "Salinas identified with the rejection of cultural and social conventions promoted by the young artists associated with the Beat Movement. Like them, he had headed toward California looking for a way out of the oppressive conventions and expectations of society and family in the post-war boom period" (Mendoza 45). The writing of the Beat Generation turned Salinas back onto literature in a way that he had abandoned as a youth. Salinas did not really begin reading seriously until he was in prison, but he identified with the Beats in a way that no other literature had ever done before. In an

interview, late in his life, Raúl Salinas said, “I knew the literature of the schools, but the Beats were ‘beat’. They were marginalized. They were the white Negroes to quote Norman Mailer’s essay, which defines that hipster, the Anglo hipster that I was living, the brown hipsters that we were” (Salinas & Mendoza 323). The writings of the Beats awakened something in Salinas that also linked his appreciation of jazz to writing poetry, but more than anything else it was the viscerality of their poetry that drew him to the Beats. It was the fact that he could identify with these poets in a way he could not with others. Raúl Salinas once said, “The roadhouses, the juke-joints, that’s where I cut my eye-teeth... the Beat was American literature that somehow didn’t fit with Edgar Allan Poe or Ralph Waldo Emerson or T.S. Eliot. These are my kinds of folks. Ted Jones¹, Jack Michelene before Kerouac and Ginsberg and Gregory Corso and Herbert Huncke. These are real people to me. It is not some book that I read. These are people I walked the streets with” (Salinas & Mendoza 323-24).

Where the celebrated Beat writers (Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Corso) offered Salinas a new sense of freedom for literature, it was Bob Kaufman that he really connected with. He connected with Kaufman on many levels. Kaufman was not white, like many of the Beats seemed to be, and Kaufman knew what it was like to be “in the joint.” From one prison poet to another, Salinas gravitated to Kaufman’s writing because “Unlike the Beat poets...he was neither college educated nor middle class, though he could identify with their street sensibility, their embrace of open literary forms, and their down-and-out stance” (Mendoza 45). Salinas so loved the Beat writings of Kaufman that he dedicated his second

book, *East of the Freeway*, to Kaufman: “To the memory of Bob Kaufman, ‘The REAL Beat.’” (i). It would be through Kaufman’s writing that Salinas would find his way into this new Beat Movement and carrying on the “REAL Beat” through his own Xicanoindio Beat poetry.

As Rod Hernandez writes, “Perhaps more than anything else is the note of solitude that connects Kaufman and Chicano poets such as Salinas. This note disturbs the complacency in modern American life by speaking to suffering” (193). It is in speaking to suffering that harkens back to the original incarnation of what the Beat Generation was about: beat as down and out and yet speaking back to it with poetry. Salinas’ poem “Shame on the Shaman” marks the turn away from the more canonical Beats to a redefined Beat through Kaufman:

Claustrophobic cabbies
 sway
 down Eastside alleyways
 chasing Cassady & Corso dreams
 that scream in the orgiastic nights
 of Peter hung
 on Ginsberg lungs
 amid sights of a long ago
 almost never, never-land
 where the Real Beat lived
 neatly ensconced
 in the heart of a

Golden Sardine.

"Will the real Mr. Kaufman
please come to the counter for your
dental plates. The County paid
for these you know, oughta consider yourself lucky." (*East of the Freeway*
3-4).

In this poem, Raúl Salinas traces his journey chasing the "Beat" through the better known Beats like Ginsberg and Cassady and yet still doesn't seem to find his place, but then he finds Kaufman living the life that these others could only write about. Besides Corso, none of the other poets that Salinas mentions had done real time in a maximum-security prison, which is what the line about the dental plates is about. Since the prison system pays for their medical and dental care, prisoners "oughta consider themselves lucky" because they are getting free dental care. At the end of the poem, Raúl Salinas lays out what he thinks "Beat" is all about: "Pluck his poems out as he sleeps! / weeping for those who never had a poem / unto themselves, and therefore / doomed to gloomy garbage-rummaging / for lost-found poems to call / their own" (4). To Salinas, Kaufman could understand "suffering" in a way that the other Beats could not and he chose to speak back to it.

Finding a new sense of Beat, Raúl Salinas takes the next evolutionary step from the Beat Generation and places activism alongside poetry and makes affecting change in the community a priority. Louis Mendoza in his article, "Barrio Aesthetics, Displacement, & Memory" writes, "Unlike that of many

Beats, Salinas's life story is full of commitments and affiliations that link him to specific political causes and ideas; his poetry is only one dimension to realizing a vision" (*East of the Freeway* 108). In an interview with Louis Mendoza he said, "Raúl was always critical of those who took up identifications such as Chicano without truly understanding what that actually means. Raúl was about practice." For Salinas, to identify with something is to be a part of it: be it Chicano, Native American, a poet, or a Beat. Having a political message was the element that Salinas used to create a new Beat poetry and continue the Beat Movement in a way that would attract new Chicano and Latino poets and artists.

Because of his imprisonment and his life on the streets, his poetry became a mixture of the language he heard on the streets: hipster-speak, Tex-Mex Spanish, and the music of the outlaw, primarily jazz. Along with the language he had a sense of purpose in which he incorporated a political agenda for *resistencia*. Louis Mendoza writes that ex-cons and prisoners often refer to their education from inside the prison walls as "a re-education" (Mendoza 56). Salinas took his re-education to heart and, "His re-education into political activism shaped his poetics even as he brought together the cacophony of jazz and beat influences. Unlike the often ideologically inconsistent counter-cultural stance of many of the beat poets, however, Salinas became a 'rebel with a causa' in an era rife with revolutionary potential" (57). Raúl Salinas continued to promote Beat aesthetics throughout his writing even when discussing Native

issues, which were deeply political and personal for him. In his poem,
 “Conversation in a Greyhound Bus Depot Coffee Shop” Raúl Salinas writes:

“Say buddy are yew a injun?”

“Yeah, man.”

“What kind?”

“MEXICAN”.

“O, ah thot yew wuz a real injun.”

As he proceeded to tell me

(quite boringly)

about his 1/64th blood quantum

and his Cherokee PRINCESS grandmother;

my prison-like coffee was getting cold,

the bus was pulling out...

and

it

was

time

to go! (*Indio Trails* 3)

In this poem, Raúl Salinas articulates the difficulties of balancing being Native and Mexicano in the face of an ignorant America, who claims native roots as a source of pride, but at the same time forgetting the 500 years of genocide attached. Poetry is one way that Raúl Salinas celebrates his Native connections,

but throughout his lifetime he was often questioned about wearing his hair in two braids, which signaled "Indian." Raúl Salinas responded to this criticism by saying, "I have buried Indian people. I have been at the birth of Indian people and I have walked across this land and I have been jailed because of supporting the Indian people's rights. They are my relatives. They taught me that...They are our cousins; they are oral tradition, we are oral tradition" (Salinas & Mendoza 325).

In this poem, there is the use of plain conversation as poetry, which is something that is deeply ensconced in Beat aesthetics. In "BELIEF & TECHNIQUE FOR MODERN PROSE," Jack Kerouac writes, "No time for poetry but exactly what is" and "Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it / Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form" (Charters, *Beat Reader* 59). In these lines Kerouac throws out any metaphorical meanings and demands a story in plain speech, which is what Salinas does with the retelling of this incident just as he remembered it. Being able to be honest about his experiences through poetry is the one element that Salinas really carried with him throughout his poetry.

Beat Poetry As Beat Down But Not Defeated: A Key Element To The Beat Generation And The Beat Movement

When Kerouac first envisioned the Beat Generation, he had one thing in mind, "beat, meaning down and out but full of intense conviction" (Kerouac, *Good Blonde* 47). This is probably the sentiment that has carried from the Beat

Generation to the Beat Movement, since it spoke to those who did not have a voice in the American mainstream. The poor, working classes, the outsider, and the outlaw found a place within the Beat Generation, but for as much as it tried to be a voice of the people; it was still championed by “white” men. Even when Kerouac and Ginsberg were not technically “white,” they were perceived so by the dominant literary culture. Ronna C. Johnson and Maria Damon in their article, “Recapturing the Skipped Beats,” relate this sentiment when they write, “The Beats identified with and emulated American underclass cultures--those of African Americans and other disenfranchised populations. Yet the best-known Beat writers, who were white men, and the institutions that solidified Beat as a movement--publishers, universities, and the media--shared many of the prejudices of the mainstream that they critiqued” (1). This is the image that the Beat Generation has received for years now and there is some validity to this view. Kerouac towards the end of his life exhibits virulent racism and extreme right-wing conservatism, many of the early Beats treated women within the movement as caregivers, support structures, as well as less than genius writers, and many of the early Beats were unwilling to deal with their own inherent racism. However, the Beat philosophy is bigger than the individuals who initially started it. The Beat philosophy does not belong to any one person or as Kerouac writes, “Beat comes out, actually, of old American whoopee and it will only change a few dresses and pants and make chairs useless in the living room and pretty soon we’ll have Beat Secretaries of State” (*Good Blonde* 65). For Kerouac and Ginsberg, seen as the architects of the Beat Generation, the

movement was meant to continue and change and become something different with every poet and artist who carries on the banner of "Beat."

Bob Kaufman and Raúl Salinas worked to carry on the Beat in a different direction, which was not writing for the underclasses but encouraging writing from the underclasses. From their unique racialized spaces and their knack for getting imprisoned, they were able to promote the hopefulness that Kerouac writes about. Their position in society is not something that should promote depression and criminality, but rather there should be a sense of hope in life that leads to bettering one's self. For Kaufman and Salinas, the tool they found was the same that Kerouac and Ginsberg used: poetry. The idea that Kerouac repeats throughout his work, "You're a Genius All The Time" (Charters, *Beat Reader* 59), is the idea that opened the door for people who did not see poetry as an option because they did not belong to a privileged class. The Beats preached a different approach to the arts and many underprivileged writers took it to heart. It is one core element that keeps the Beat moving from the Beat Generation to Beat Movement.

CHAPTER III

RIFFING WORDS AND THE RHYTHM OF THE BEAT: THE AESTHETICS OF
PERFORMING BEAT POETRY

If there is one thing that defines Beat poetry, it is rhythm—not in the sense of rhyme and meter, but something that is felt when a poem is being composed, when it is being read. It is inherent in the name of the movement itself: “Beat” like the beat of a drum. The word “beat” as Bob Kaufman defines in his letter to the San Francisco Chronicle is silent but it always heard, “It is not the beat played by who is beating the drum. His is a noisy loud one, the silent beat is beaten by who is not beating on the drum, his silent beat drowns out all the noise, it comes before and after every beat, you hear it in between, its sound is ” (Kaufman, *Cranial Guitar* 97). It is the rhythm of suffering that Kaufman is referring to here, but it is the rhythm that makes it beat. It is musical and filled with emotion. It is “composed on the tongue” as Ginsberg said (*Deliberate Prose* 236). If the Beats have done nothing else for poetry they have paved the way for a new force in poetry: the spoken word movement. Slam, spoken word, performance poetry, all of which are probably the most popular forms of poetry today were popularized by the Beat Generation and are carried on by the Beat Movement.

Performance is an element of Beat writing that challenges the privilege of text over orality and at the same time is promotes participation with an audience. Diana Taylor, in her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing*

Cultural Memory in the Americas, writes, “Instead of privileging *texts* and *narratives*, we could also look to scenarios [performances] as meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (28). The Beats have always favored performance in conjunction with the written text and have sought to decenter the privileged text over performance. According to Taylor, performance and text go hand in hand to create social practices that work to close the gap between text and body. As Allen Ginsberg once wrote:

The individual soul is under attack and for that reason a “beat” generation existed and will continue to exist under whatever name rosy generation lost or as Kerouac once prophesied found until it is found. The soul that is. And a social place for the soul to exist manifested in *this* world. By soul I mean that which differs man from thing, i.e., person—not mere mental consciousness—but feeling bodily consciousness. (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 6)

The concept of bodily consciousness is something that is not only felt by the performance (artist), but also the person watching or observing. For poets performing before an audience, performance becomes critical for the continuing practice of Beatness. In keeping the Beat moving from poet to poet, there is a sense of building a connection between the poet/performer and the spectator/audience member. Augusto Boal, performance studies and theatre scholar introduces a theory of impactful performance that he calls “spect-acting.” In his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal writes,

In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors.... Everything that actors do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions—just as we do in our everyday lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theatre, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the woman and man in the street do not know that they are speaking theatre. (xxx)

Performance and responsibility are core essential elements to the Beat Movement, and they have been ingrained in Beat philosophy since its inception. The Beats have always been interested in capturing the moment through their writings. Jack Kerouac's Spontaneous Prose is grounded in understanding the immediate moment. In his "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," Kerouac writes, "Nothing is muddy that *runs in time* and to laws of *time*—Shakespearian stress of dramatic need to speak now in own unalterable way or forever hold tongue" (Charters 57). The "now" is important to Beat writing because as Erik Mortenson writes, "The Beat desire to 'capture immediacy'" is political as well as personal" (155). Immediacy puts performance on par with the written text and that makes it political, but at the same time, in order to achieve immediacy in writing means privileging the writer as a player of words like a musician plays an instrument, so that it exists like a song evoking emotion. The poet or writer's life becomes the rhythm behind the words. But to understand why capturing immediacy is so important, we must look at the driving force behind this element of Beat: jazz.

In an interview with Mick Wallace of the *New York Post*, Jack Kerouac was asked, “Why is jazz so important to this new mystique [referring to the Beat style of writing]?” and Kerouac simply answered, “That’s the music of the Beat Generation” (Maher, *Empty Phantoms* 65). For Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Neal Cassady, jazz is where it all began. This was the music of the underground scenes and for a group of young writers looking to capture an authentic voice of America jazz was that authentic sound. Jazz was the music played in the clubs that you had to know people to get into. In many ways it was a secret language of the underclasses of America, mostly for Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady it was liberation from the constraints of American society in the late 1940s and 50s. For the Beats, jazz was the music of their generation because “Jazz exposes the failure of America to live up to its initial promise of new democratic vistas” (Kohli 105). But above all else it gave them an ear to hear their words. Kerouac first got the idea to write with sound in mind when he saw Lee Konitz play at a Harlem club. “Lee Konitz in 1951,” Kerouac writes, “inspired me to try to write the way he plays” (Coolidge 48). Listening to these jazz artists in these Harlem nightclubs gave Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady a sense that jazz prefigured the new form of literature they had been looking for and, of course, it was steeped heavily in African American culture. Being of racially and socially liminal status they found something in jazz and this culture that they could not get access to anywhere else. So they took the style and tried to make it their own, but could never really get full access to it because even though they were not quite “white” they weren’t people of color either. The interesting thing about jazz

though is that even though it is a purely American music grounded in African and African American experience and sound, it offers a space for people of all colors and nationalities to exist in. As Amiri Baraka writes in his book *Blues People*, jazz offered a cultural breakdown between Black and white cultures and “the real point of this breakdown was that it reflected not so much the white American’s increased understanding of the Negro, but rather the fact that the Negro had created a music that offered such a profound reflection of America that it could attract white Americans to want to play it or listen to it for exactly that reason” (*Baraka Reader* 38).

For Kerouac and Ginsberg jazz was something that could easily translate to their writing. These Beats were performing jazz with words instead of notes and they recognized that it had a power to bring different cultures together where they had a common point of interest. Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Cassady saw it as a way to gain access to that secret African American world they could not gain entrance to through any other medium. Kerouac could be part of the jazz club scene and be accepted because he appreciated the music for what it was, the music of the African American, the music that the working poor listened to in bars and nightclubs. Jazz was an art that spoke the language of the streets. In that same interview with Mike Wallace, Kerouac said, “Jazz is very complicated. It’s just as complicated as Bach. They chords, the structures, the harmony, and everything. And then it has a tremendous beat. You know, tremendous drummers. They can drive it. It has just a tremendous drive. It can drive you right out of yourself” (Maher, *Empty Phantoms* 65). It is this drive that

runs through Kerouac's writing. In his most famous novel, *On The Road*, the two protagonists Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise [Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac] are searching for "IT." The search for "IT" comes from jazz lingo, it is what Kaufman talks about when he refers to the silent beat. It is this "IT" that becomes a search for the soul of America in *On The Road*.

But what is this, "IT," that they are looking for and seemingly never find in their travels on the road? Erick Mortenson writes, "Kerouac's description of jazz has recourse to his enigmatic "IT"—the moment in jazz when the musician, the audience, and individual listeners all come together as a whole. This intersubjective rapport elides racial difference—a positive step towards integration but also covering-up the fundamental social problems that created racial difference in the first place" (51). It is this cohesion that they are seeking; jazz offers a unity of differences with each musician playing their own "riffs," but yet somehow they come together and make a coherent music. The spirit of this cohesion is what the Beats tried to bring to their writing, but instead of bridging different musicians' riffs, they tried to mesh together the language they heard on the streets with the "classic" literature they were reading and the audience as a participator into their work. Their writing was making the personal political because, as they viewed it, the personal was already political. In *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*, Jon Panish writes that the Beats were deeply invested in finding forms that would free what they felt inside themselves: "Thus, the freedom embodied in jazz improvisation manifests itself in fiction that improvises on the *theme* of

freedom” (131). Jazz is freedom: freedom from previous forms that required sheet music and freedom for African Americans to play a music that was truly their own. It celebrated its various influences from Native American drums, African chants, the Negro slave work songs, and the many influences from the cultures that clashed in the city streets of places like New Orleans, Chicago, and New York.

Jazz did not arrive on the music scene in the 20th century as most people believe, but actually has its roots in the Blues, which goes back much further than the 20th Century, to the slave ships of the 16th Century. Amiri Baraka writes, “It is a native American music, the product of the black man in this country; or to put it more exactly the way I have come to think about it, blues could not exist if the African captives had not become American captives” (*Baraka Reader* 21). The Blues bleeds suffering and at the same time renounces that suffering. In many ways, singing the Blues is a way of casting that suffering out of oneself; it is a spiritual and metaphysical experience told through song. New immigrants came into America in the late 1890s and early 20th century and they brought new music with them. If jazz is nothing else it is a negotiation of different elements to make music. This is where jazz gained its feet and then as it began to be played in brothels and backdoor saloons, it gained popularity and an audience. Jazz was born as musicians from the different immigrant backgrounds began to play together and fuse together the music that was on the street corners. “At the core of jazz,” Amor Kohli writes, “[is] a deep and abiding sense of *sui generis* hopes, desires, aspirations, and rage of African

Americans who persistently continue their drive toward self-determination even as it is continually thwarted" (Kohli 105).

What is interesting about jazz is that it is successful because it is almost a cacophony of sounds that somehow work together, much like the experience of the African American or other people of color in America. "Jazz is a negotiation," says Winston Marsalis in Ken Burns' *Jazz* and that belief is why jazz becomes the music of the African American and the music of the American underworld. The Blues, which is where jazz is rooted, could never be middle-class music; it could not survive outside of the poor and working class. The Blues is designed to speak from the suffering of the poor, but specifically the Black poor and working class. As Amiri Baraka writes, "The idea of a white blues singer seems an even more violent contradiction of terms than the idea of a middle-class blues singer. The material of blues was not available to the white American even though some strange circumstances might prompt him to look for them" (*Baraka Reader* 37). As "white" musicians began to look for a music that was truly American, these musicians tried to latch onto the Blues, but it was not accessible for several reasons; however, jazz offered that bridge. "For black men," Maria Damon writes, "the creative possibilities offered by the jazz world can provide a respite from the trauma of social pain (of which they are fully conscious), while for the women and the Jews, jazz life is the risk they take rather than a balm. The vague anxiety of the first two points of the triangle becomes a tragic self-consciousness in the third" (*Postliterary* 39).

Jazz would never have crossed out of the underworld club scene and into the America white middle class dance clubs if it wasn't for the rise of the Black middle class in the early twentieth century. Jazz in its essence is a fusion of sounds and so therefore, a mixture of various influences. This type of music offered a door between the "white" world and the Black, it even crossed class lines because as Baraka declares, "The Negro middle-class would not have music if it were not for jazz. The white man would have no access to blues. It was music capable of reflecting not only the Negro and a black America but a white America as well" (*Baraka Reader* 37-38). The black middle-class was a relatively new phenomenon that slowly began to gain a foothold in American society because of the creation of Black universities and the access for education that was not as readily available in prior years. As more Black doctors, lawyers, and professors were being made, they were able to make their move up the social ladder to a lower middle-class status, which did two things: one, it opened the door to better living conditions and access to "high class" art and two, it left these middle-class people disconnected from the poor and working-class Blacks. Becoming black middle-class also gave them more access to the "white" world and therefore a sharing of ideas and music began to happen. This is where the Beats come in thirty years later when these black middle-class children are in their twenties and early thirties. Two of those black middle-class children would go on to be part of the Beat Generation: Ted Joans and LeRoi Jones, both of whom changed not only the writing of Beat poetry but the performance of Beat poetry as well.

Part I: Ted Joans: Rent-A-Beatnik Jazz Poet

The Truth

If you should see
 a man walking
 down a crowded street
 talking aloud
 to himself
 don't run
 in the opposite direction
 but run toward him
 for he is a POET!

You have NOTHING to fear
 from the poet
 but the TRUTH (Joans, *Teducation*, 236).

Ted Joans came to the Beat scene in New York because he was chasing Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance and ended up in Greenwich Village. Ted Joans came to New York to find himself as an African American poet, but when he arrived in Harlem, Joans could not accept the hardline doctrine of the Harlem Renaissance and its successor, the Black Arts Movement. He was a surrealist, had been since he was a kid and his love for poetry and art was more than political and social; it was about the love of the power to transform one's self. In the early 1950s, the Village was something different

because “[t]he Village had a reputation not only as a haven for artists and other non-conformists, but also as a refuge from white racism and the deleterious effects of racism on black communities” (Panish 24). Throughout Joans’ life, he was never a character to be boxed into one identity category and the Village offered that freedom. In the 1950s and 60s, the Village was one of the two hearts of the Beat Generation, the other being San Francisco, and so it was that what Joans found in the Village was this new group of “angelheaded hipsters” who wrote with a free style and seemingly lacked the hang-ups of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement.

In *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*, Sally Banes writes, “The Beat Generation of the late Fifties was an integrated one in which not only white and black poets met, but also, as Norman Mailer pointed out in ‘The White Negro,’ white writers and other hipsters appropriated elements of black cultural style, from marijuana to sexual freedom to jazz prosody” (146). Jazz poetry uses many of the techniques of the musical styling such as interjection, folk sayings, and improvisation. These elements mesh well with the Beat technique of free association and authentic voices. Joans was attracted to fringe characters and his love of jazz poetry found him falling into company with Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Bob Kaufman. His jazz poetry would be his greatest contribution to Beat poetry and his attitude of not conforming to one identity would be a theme that the Beat Movement would continue. Ted Joans understood the importance of performance in poetry and in life. The composition of jazz is nothing if not

rooted in performance because jazz music is usually created improvisationally. Joans would spend his whole life perfecting his jazz poetry and because of this dedication in 2001 Ishmael Reed introduced Joans as the “best jazz poet of the twentieth century” (Fox 44) at a sold-out reading at the University of California at Berkeley. He was a surrealist by training and Joans brought that aspect of having a skewed aspect to everything he did. To better understand why Joans would choose to be a part of the Beat Generation, we must first look at the life he led.

The Myth Of Ted Joans

Ted Joans was born in Cairo, Illinois, on July 4, 1928, the son of two riverboat workers. Ted Joans was actually born Theodore Jones the Second, but he decided to make his name, “unique and original”. Joans writes in his autobiography that he wanted to have “a self-controlled destiny of my own: Ted Joans” (224). From an early age Joans had always had an impulse to travel, claiming that he was born on a riverboat. By being the Second Theodore Jones, he writes:

[I] was supposed to carry on by being named Theodore The Second, but hahaha I was too Yankee Doodle Dandy to stroll through life bearing such a silly-billy-goat title. So I became and remain this self-made man with the lower-case letters, who stretches those magical eight letters of the alphabet when my signature is summoned to greater length than all others. (224)

Joans writes this piece in jazz poetic style by playing with “interjection” (hahaha) and “quotes” or “samples” of other texts such as the song “Yankee Doodle Dandee” and folk saying such as “silly-billy-goat.” Gerald Nicosia, a good friend of Joans recalls, “The story goes that he [Joans’ father] gave Ted a trumpet when he was 12 years old and dropped him in Memphis with the words, ‘OK, son, go make a living,’” ending his origin story in true jazz Beat style (Squatriglia A-18). Being that both of Joans’ parents were riverboat performers there may be some truth to this legend. However, his father did not cast Ted Joans aside. Theodore Jones the First was murdered in a mob riot in Detroit in 1943 when young Ted was only fifteen years old. The murderers were never apprehended and this always haunted him. In “Je Me Vois” Joans writes, “[N]evertheless this serious matter has been told to specialists of traditional West African (wise women and men) sorcery who have cast the spell of physical misfortune upon the nefarious Caucasoid working-class men who are guilty” (256).

When Ted was young, possibly twelve years old, he went to live with his aunt in Indiana. While he was there, his aunt who worked for a rich white family as a maid would bring him back all of the discarded books and magazines that the family was simply going to throw away. Ted would read through these magazines voraciously and he would eagerly wait for whatever his aunt would bring home. Amongst the magazines and books was a 1933 issue of *Vogue*, with a feature on Salvador Dali, and several magazines on French Art. Probably the most influential book that his aunt brought back for

him was David Gascoyne's *Short Survey of Surrealism*. This book would deeply influence Joans throughout his life and would have a lasting impact on his poetry. According to one of Joans' biographers, Michel Fabre, Ted was so deeply affected by the Surrealists that "[A]t the age thirteen Ted Joans was so fascinated, and so upset because he could not read French, that he went to mow the white folks' lawn to be able to buy a dictionary and start translating word by word some of the texts he had collected" (309).

Ted Joans' first interest was not poetry but art, and he was deeply affected by Salvador Dali, which led him to pursue his education in Art. In 1950, at the age of 22, Ted Joans graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Painting. Even though Joans' aunt was considered working class, he was able to live a black middle-class life and secure a college degree, which was slowly becoming more accepted. He, however, suffered much discrimination in Indiana and wanted desperately to become an artist, so in 1951, he decided to leave Indiana and head out to New York City. Ted Joans writes, "After graduating from the fools and schools (high as well as low college cowards) I prepared Ted Joans to enroll in the greatest mixed magic institution on earth: New York City's Manhattan" (220). Upon arriving in New York, Ted wasted no time in seeking out the artists he admired so that he could learn from them what he could not learn from Indiana University. The ten years that Joans spent in New York City would be the most socially productive of his life and he would refer to this period in his life as the beginning of his "Teducation." It

would be in New York that Ted would find his calling as a poet; although he never gave up his art, he found power in words.

Ted Joans' greatest influence as a poet was Langston Hughes. From an early age, Ted compiled a list of poets that he considered the greatest influences on him and he called these poets, VIPs (Very Impecunious Poets). Langston Hughes was at the top of his VIP list and when he first arrived in New York, Ted writes that he followed in Hughes' footsteps trying to find his own Black voice. It was not until he went to the Schomburg Library in Harlem that he discovered a world he had never known. Joans writes that "[i]t was at the Schomburg (the original place) that I studied Black American history and discovered Black American artists who were never included in the art books that were available back home in Indiana" (228). It was in Harlem, in search of Langston Hughes, that Joans would find one of the key themes that would resonate throughout his poetry, being Black in America. Although Black liberation was a deep concern for Joans, he made it clear in an interview in *Transition* that "I Ted Joans, am not so much into [Black] nationalism as I am into *naturalism*. The entire human group of people have got to get back to the *natural*" (Gates 6). It was this attitude to race relations that allowed him to easily slip into a group of bohemian artists called the Beat Generation.

Ted Joans' introduction to the Beat Generation was through Jack Kerouac. Ted met Kerouac at one of Joans' monthly "rent parties." These parties, thrown by Joans, were to help to support his studio in Greenwich Village. At these parties a jar would be passed around the room and people would throw in what

they could from dimes and quarters and the occasional twenty-dollar bill. Upon meeting Kerouac, Joans knew there was something different about this man. Joans met Kerouac before he had published *On the Road* and so was not famous yet. It was through Kerouac that Joans would get his induction into the New York jazz scene. "Kerouac was a distinct character," Joans writes, "even amongst the Village bohemians. He was consistent in his adoration of jazz music and some of its musicians. I have been on the 'A' Train with Kerouac en route to Harlem. He knew more about the old jazz haunts than I did" (242). Jazz would become a key component to Joans' poetry; the driving force behind such poems as "Domestic Faxophone" and "Ain't Misbehaving like Raven." The integration of jazz into his poetry reading is something that he borrowed from both Jack Kerouac and Langston Hughes. Kerouac's wealth of knowledge of jazz in Harlem left Joans with a lasting admiration.

It was with the Beat Generation that Ted Joans could write poems like "The .38," which would launch Joans' career as a poet. The poem "The .38" tells the story of a man who lives next door to a man who beats his wife:

i hear the man downstairs slapping the hell out of his stupid wife again
 i hear him push and shove her around the overcrowded room
 i hear her scream and beg for mercy
 i hear him tell her *there is no mercy* (Joans, *Teducation* 80).

As the poem progresses, the violence gets worse and her screams get louder while the speaker of the poem simply listens. Joans' speaker never tries to intervene even when she knocks frantically on the speakers' door crying for

help. Joans' speaker simply listens to the horror outside his door. It is not until the climax of the poem that the speaker realizes the consequences of his inaction:

i hear him pull her limp body across their overcrowded room
 i hear the springs of their bed creak from the weight of her beautiful body
 i hear him say DAMN YOU, I WARNED YOU, AND NOW IT'S TOO
 LATE
 THEN I HEAR THE LOUD REPORT OF THE THIRTY-EIGHT
 CALIBER REVOLVER!!! (80)

In this poem, Joans uses the rhetorical technique of anaphora beginning each line with "I hear" to not just build a rhythm to his poem of a beating heart, but also to keep the reader suspended in horror. His use of sound instead of sight makes the events of next door that much more horrific. Through the use of sound, Joans is putting his reader (or listener) in the same position of the speaker, uncertain of what to do and afraid of what could happen. By starting each line with the lowercase "i," Joans is diminishing the power of the speaker's identity and undermining the faith that is usually placed in a narrator. The speaker is left paralyzed, only able to listen. By the time the listener gets to the climax of the poem, the listener is supposed to be as shocked and guilt-ridden as the speaker. This poem is also an example of repetition with variation, which is a key element in jazz poetics. "The .38" remains Joans' most critically acclaimed and popular poem. It could be said that the success of this poem launched Ted Joans' career as a poet.

Joans' control of narrative and his ability to enthrall his audience is what made him such a popular success in the underground poetry world. His first book of poetry, *The Hipsters*, sold out all five hundred copies of its first run and a second printing of two thousand copies had to be ordered, which also sold out almost as quickly as the first. Joans quickly began to gain recognition as a vital and important poet, but as much as he was categorized as a Beat poet, he did not want to be known simply as a Beat. Joans preferred to be a poet of his own validity. When articles ran featuring Ted Joans' readings, Joans insisted they read: "Unlike most poets of the beat generation, Ted Joans, who spoke here Thursday, refuses to be called a beatnik. He is a 'jazz poet' of the beat generation" (Joans, *Je Me Vois* 235). He always worked to maintain a balance between his role as a Black poet and his role as a Beat. It would be through jazz that he would be able to find the connection that allowed him to occupy both roles as Black man and Beat poet.

Joans' involvement with both the Black Arts Movement of Harlem and the Beat Poets of Greenwich left some wondering where Ted Joans' loyalties really lay. According to Joans, "I was a living contradiction to some of my poet friends, especially those who dwelled in the cocoon of traditional aesthetics...Perhaps never before had a Black poet gained the popularity of such a large segment in the downtown White bohemia and weekend tourists. Of course this was the cause for ostracizing me and the confusion in certain White as well as Black circles" (236). The feeling of ostracization from both Harlem and Greenwich Village was one of the factors that led to Joans' decision to

expatriate to Africa and France. In the poem, "I Too, At the Beginning," Joans left his lasting impression of America in the 1950s with lines like: "I am the early Black Beat / ... / Among the white beatniks / Who had big publishers / But little bank accounts / Yet we, like Crispus Attucks / ... / We were 'invisible men'" (*Je Me Vois* 227). The growing racial tension in America was another factor in Joans' decision to move to Tangiers.

Upon leaving New York, Ted Joans was quoted as saying that he would not come back to America, "until the President of the USA was a black woman" (Fabre 312). Of course, Joans was not alone in his choice to expatriate; other Black writers such as Richard Wright, William Melvin Kelley, and Melvin Dixon also left the United States to pursue their artistic careers for more receptive and less hostile audiences. To answer the accusations that he had betrayed America, Ted Joans writes, "If I could be accused of 'double crossing' America, especially the so-called 'American Dream' (and other fast-food pie in the electronic sky), then I am guilty" (245). Joans, once again uses jazz Beat poetics for his answer to this accusatory question. Although it might have seemed strange to his fellow Beat and Harlem poets, Ted had wanted to go to Paris since he first laid eyes on those French art magazines and fell in love with Surrealism. In his autobiography, Joans claims, "I am blessed by the ancestors. I have forewarned allyall that jazz is MY religion, and surrealism my point of view" (244).

What Ted Joans brought to the Beat Generation was an African American surrealism, which was different than the surrealism of Europe at the time. The surrealism that Ted Joans would have become involved with in the 1950s and

60s was more aggressive in its methodology. In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin Kelley quotes the Chicago Surrealist Group defining surrealism as:

the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination and love...Its basic aim is to lessen and eventually to completely resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams. By definition subversive, surrealist thought and action are intended not only to discredit and destroy the forces of repression, but also to emancipate desire and supply it with new poetic weapons. (5)

This definition of surrealism meshed well with the Beats' subversive ideology as well as their interest in jazz and jazz-inspired poetry. Joans often wrote jazzy surrealist poems because "The key to the jazz moment resides in its ability to turn individual transcendence into social cohesion" (Mortenson 156). By Robin Kelley's definition, surrealism is designed to bring together everyday moments with the practice of dreams, and jazz does the same thing with music. Jazz is very much a surrealist art form, blending the real with what is possible, but only conceived in dreams.

Part II: Before There Was Amiri Baraka There Was LeRoi Jones

Amiri Baraka has come to be known as a prominent African American poet, dramatist, and activist. However, he has had several radical shifts in his philosophy and art and has been criticized for changing his philosophy more often than he changed his name. Baraka began his life as Everett LeRoi Jones

and then was simply known as LeRoi Jones, but in the late 1960s became Imamu Amiri Baraka and eventually simply Amiri Baraka. Each name is attached to a different phase of his life and he has been heavily criticized for changing his motivations and ideals. Baraka responds to this criticism by saying, “I have changed over the years because I have struggled to understand [the] world...People who question change cannot really be trying to do this. How can you be in the world and your ideas over the years remain the same. Those who question change are intellectually lazy, or suffer from the passivity of the overstuffed or cryptically satisfied” (qtd. in Fleming 25). As much as Baraka has changed there are two things that never waver: his dedication to social justice and his dedication to writing. It is this that has made Baraka a force that continues to compel today. It is this dedication that he brought to the Beat Generation and carried into the Beat Movement. When Baraka came to the Beats, he was not Amiri Baraka; he was LeRoi Jones and so he will be referred to as LeRoi Jones from this point forward. What Jones brought to the Beats was a musicality and a conviction that demanded that Beat be political. Jones brought race into the Beat consciousness in a way that it had not been done before which would influence the poetics of the Beat Movement.

LeRoi Jones grew up in Newark, New Jersey, in the 1930s and 40s, not too far from the heart of the Beat Generation. Jones grew up in a black middle-class family, which was a rather strange space for African Americans. His mother, Anna Lois Jones, went to Howard University (one of the growing black colleges around the country) and his father, Coyt Leverette Jones, was a postal worker.

Although his mother became pregnant with her first child in college and was forced to drop out to raise her children, she did return to college later in her life and gain a degree. The prospect of LeRoi finishing school and going to college was a real option and that was something that many Black children did not have at the time. LeRoi spent much of his youth going to school in white-dominated schools and being pushed by his mother to attend college prep classes.

Jones always had an ambivalent relationship with his black middle-class upbringing. Because Jones saw complications with the simple white/black divide, he created his own social ranking system of African Americans with the system of colors: black, brown, and yellow. Black, according to Jones scale, was “fundamental black life, the life of blues people, the real and the solid and the strong and the beautiful.” Brown he considered himself, “half real and half lodged in dream and shadow. The connected to reality by emotion (and logic).” Yellow, was the worst category, it represents, “the artificial, the well-to-do, the middle class really” (Baraka 54). Even though Jones wanted to be Black on his scale, he could not put himself there. He hated the fact that his family often wanted to be part of the Yellow category of his scale and Jones wanted nothing to do with that. “My family, as I’ve to tell,” Jones writes, “was a lower middle-class family finally. For all the bourgeois underpinnings on my mother’s side, the Depression settled the hash of this one black bourgeois family. And those tensions were always with us” (Baraka 15). The tensions were as much racial as they were class-based.

As a young child, LeRoi experienced racism at every turn but he did not know how to process it until it became blatant, such as when he was not able to play with the white kids in his neighborhood. In his autobiography, Jones writes, "But it let you know that all that was abstract to you, about black and white and all that, was not really abstract, that it all could not be waved away, or laughed away, or forgot not known about" (Baraka 40). Jones had dealt with racial discrimination throughout his life but there had always been a sense of acceptance until he reached high school where racism was a daily occurrence for young LeRoi. "But I was totally unprepared for the McKinley and Barringer experiences," Jones writes, "in which the whites ran the social and going to school/academic part of that institutional life. And I put up with many nigger callings and off the wall comments and intimidations, even getting cussed out regularly in Italian" (Baraka 41). Throughout this time, Jones learned to keep to himself and became bitter toward the educational system. However, this did not stop him from attending a Black college. Howard University would be the college that Jones would pick and quickly grow disillusioned by because "You see, Howard itself was a blinding yellow," Jones writes (Baraka 113). It was the Brown mob that Jones ran with and it was the Black mob he wanted to be a part of, but all that he was offered was Yellow and it disgusted him. He thought many of the classes and the people who attended were just there to replicate a Yellow class of Black folks. Even though he wanted to pursue an intellectual course, he did not feel that Howard was the place to do it and so because of his

disillusionment with the educational institutional system he would drop out to join the Air Force.

Jones' Air Force experience would do two things for him: one, it would leave him bitter toward any institution, and two, it would push him to become a poet. Jones was often assigned to the jobs no one wanted and suffered from the institutional racism inherent in the Armed Services. As a black man, he was separated from the others and saw it was no different from the world he thought he left. "The world of Howard University and its brown and yellow fantasy promise had faded," Jones writes, "leaving a terrible frustration and sense of deprivation...I thought the sharp and relentless striving to become intellectual was the answer to this void" (Baraka 164). It was in the Air Force that Jones would set his life to being a poet and a writer. He began to read voraciously and the other guys would tease him about it, but it did not stop him from pursuing his intellectual endeavor. He began to digest the Eastern Buddhists as well as Marx and European thought causing his supervising officer to become suspicious that he was a communist. Jones remembers, "One day I got a message to report to the first sergeant and the adjutant and they said I had been removed from my crew, taken off 'flight status,' and my 'secret' clearance rescinded" (Baraka 175). Within a week, he was discharged from the Air Force as an "undesirable" (177). This incident was something that Jones actually wanted, to be out of the Air Force, and so he set his path to moving to Greenwich Village and being a poet.

The Village And The Birth Of Leroi Jones' Poetics

When LeRoi Jones decided that he would leave his black middle-class life to live in New York and be a poet, he knew he needed to go to the Village. Greenwich Village of New York City was the mecca for artists and poets when Jones arrived in 1957. During his stint in the Air Force, he had visited the Village and seen the artist scene there and knew that if he was serious about being a poet, he would need to be there. The trouble that Jones had when arriving in New York was finding the money to survive in the city and still being able to hone his craft. At the time of his arrival he had already begun writing, but none of the poems he wrote felt quite right to him. "I'd begun to write it not knowing what the hell I was doing" (Baraka 199), Jones recollects. He felt he needed to find his style and so he travelled the Village artist circles looking for inspiration and also a job. It was not until he found work for *The Record Trader* that Jones connected back to a love he had not considered for poetic inspiration: jazz.

In his autobiography, LeRoi Jones writes, "I've said that one constant for me from the time of any consciousness in helping to define the world has been music" (Baraka 65). It would be jazz that would define his poetry and give him a voice in a way he could not find by reading the European writers that he had been absorbing while living in the Village. Jazz offered something that was at the core of who he was. In a piece on the jazz poetry of Amiri Baraka, Mary Ellison writes that "For Baraka [Jones], jazz was and is the voice of the people and because he does not play professionally it is all the more essential to base

the structure and content of his poetry on the music" (118). At *The Record Trader*, which was a jazz magazine that did not last too long, Jones' job was to organize the jazz records in alphabetical order and ship them out as order came in, but as he ordered the records, he gained an education of jazz that he never had through casual listening. The more he organized, listened, and studied these artists the more his appreciation for jazz and its implications for Black people became clearer. Jones realized that words had as much impact on him as did the music, but he wanted to find a way to mix them together and create his voice as a poet. According to Mary Ellison:

Baraka [Jones] was determined to demonstrate in his poetry the way in which blues and jazz illuminated the human condition as well as encapsulating the shifting, developing responses of African American people to their particular circumstances. While always prepared to be oppositional and to represent his own marginalized community, Baraka was supremely capable of recognizing basic human needs and the way in which these could find sharply defined expression in the conjuncture of jazz and poetry. (123)

LeRoi Jones began to write jazz articles for the magazine and contribute a jazz style of writing that began to form his own writing style.

It was in that first year of being in the Village that Jones would meet Ted Joans, and Ted Joans would be LeRoi Jones' introduction to the Beat Generation. Both LeRoi Jones and Ted Joans shared a love of jazz and poetry and LeRoi saw that jazz poetry was a viable form of poetry and more importantly it was his

own voice and not an imitation of what he had been reading. As his style began to develop, Ted introduced him to Allen Ginsberg and his new poem, "Howl." Upon reading, "Howl" LeRoi would write, "I was moved by this poem so much because it talked about a world I could identify with and relate to. His language and his rhythms and the poem's contents were real to me. Unlike the cold edges and exclusiveness of the *New Yorker* poem that had made me cry, Ginsberg talked of a different world, one much closer to my own" (Baraka 219). LeRoi was so impressed with Ginsberg that he wrote a letter to him on toilet paper and Ginsberg replied back with a letter also written on toilet paper. This connection to Ginsberg led him to want to be a part of this Beat Generation, which seemed to offer a freedom and poetry about a world he knew, but at the same time it was socially conscious. LeRoi wanted his poetry to mean something and to be able to speak about the injustices he saw around him, so he continued corresponding with Ginsberg and eventually exchanging poetry with him.

This time that Jones would be when he would experience his first prolific period as a poet. He began to write daily and produce his first successful publication, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note." Although this poem is still heralded as one of his LeRoi Jones' most important poems, it still was not representative of his jazz style. Poems like "In The Tradition," "How You Sound?," and "Rhythm & Blues (I), represent the flowing long lines that jazz encourages, which can be compared to the phrasing of horn players like Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie who learned circular breathing to the extend the

length of the line. Jones' long poem "In the Tradition" traces the history of Black people in America in a jazz style:

Blues walk weeps ragtime
 Painting slavery
 women laid around
 working feverishly for slavemaster romeos
 as if in ragtime they spill
 their origins like chillers (lost chillen
 in the streets to be
 telephoned to by Huggie
 Bear from channel 7, for the White Shadow
 gives advice on how to hold our homes
 together, tambien tu, Chicago Hermano). (Baraka, *Tranasbluesency* 199)

As Jones had more public readings and the poetry scene became more active, his desire to write more politically aware work grew and it was reflected in his poetry. But the main drive for Jones in the late 50s and early 60s was the development of a style that was able to incorporate music (jazz, in particular), social issues (like Ginsberg's "Howl") as well as a desire to bridge a gap between his own "brownness" and the "Black" he wanted to achieve. Jones sincerely believed "jazz was the most effective, the most persuasive, form of demo-cratic symbolic action, and that American writers would do well to consider both its formal and social implications" (Magee 695). He took it on as

his cause to show that jazz poetry was poetry for the people, and in Jones' case it was the poetry of African Americans.

During his time in the Village Jones took up writing jazz reviews and promoting jazz musicians. His reviews and his articles on jazz and blues culture were eventually turned into his critical study of Black music, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. Originally published in 1963, this book detailing the history of Black music in America and its influence on "white" America remains one of the most important books on Black music to date. It is a scathing criticism of "white" racism in America and a detailed history of the blues and jazz musicians. It detailed where the music style came, such as African spirituals, slave work songs, and the brothel house music where it is commonly thought to have originated. What made his reviews and his articles unique was that he employed his jazz style of writing to his non-fiction and planned to write not only for the "white" middle class audience but for Black people as well. John Gennari in his article, "Baraka's Bohemian Blues," writes that Jones' critical writing is bold because "Brashly defying the strictures of New Critical formalism and the pleasantries of middlebrow journalism, Baraka turned jazz writing into a performance, an intense drama of sound, feeling, and movement" (255). For Jones, jazz was more than a music or poetic style; it offered him a bridge between worlds, which Jones certainly felt was its perfect position.

Running With The Beats: Leroi Jones And The Beat Generation

Although it was Ted Joans that introduced LeRoi Jones to the Beat Generation, it was Allen Ginsberg that indoctrinated him into the movement. Jones would come to the Beats late in the 1950s and early 60s, after the major publications of "Howl" and Kerouac's *On The Road*, and the Beat was already changing from its earlier incarnation guided by Kerouac's philosophy. The Beat when Jones was exposed to it had Ginsberg's influence, as its main driving force and certainly it was more political than before. Kaufman, out on the West Coast was certainly changing the face of Beat and so Jones felt an affinity. The one thing that struck Jones about them was their inclusion and embrace of Black culture, especially in a time of racial and social turmoil that was postwar American. Jon Panish, author of *The Color of Jazz*, writes:

Viewed from the vantage point of the Beats...postwar culture would appear to have been making strides toward interracial borrowing, admiration, and respect. However, this apparent racial cross-fertilization was thoroughly in the control, under the domination, of white people. Thus, although there is interracial cultural activity occurring at these sites...it is a particular hybrid culture that had and continued to emerge from the conjecture of tradition, condition, needs, and desires of black people" (xv).

Jones was very aware of the white and black tension since coming to the Village. He even tried to change it by being involved in two interracial relationships, the later ending in children and marriage to the poet Hettie Jones.

The Beats had their fair share of interracial relationships and in a time where interracial relationships would often invoke violent confrontations much like gay bashing today. It was considered unnatural since interracial marriage at this time was mostly illegal. By dating and even marrying a “white” woman, he was putting both of them at risk and having an interracial child was even more taboo. The Beats seemed like a safe space for their relationship and their children. According to Jones, “I took up with the Beats because that’s what I saw taking off and flying that somewhat resembled myself. The open and implied rebellion—of form and content. Aesthetic as well as social and political” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 230). Considering Jones’ black middle-class upbringing and his need to be an artist, he always felt like an outsider and the Beats were nothing if not a refuge for outsiders in a time when outsiders were being persecuted. For interraciality, the Beats were not exempt from the inherent racism of their society, but at the same time they were more inclusive than many others. Jones felt that this space had its limits, but as he writes, “I could see the young white boys and girls in their pronouncement of disillusion with and ‘removal’ from society as being related to the black experience. That made us colleagues of the spirit” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 230).

LeRoi Jones always saw himself as a transitional figure and his time with the Beat Generation was no different. Even with the Beats there was always a pull toward something different. During this time, his poetics certainly began to shift to being more political than some of the other Beat writers. Taking his knowledge of Black music and the ever-growing presence of the Civil Rights

Movement, Jones began to write poems such as “An Agony. As Now.” and “A Poem for Willie Best.” Both of these poems are highly political and offer a biting criticism of racism that Jones felt on a daily basis. In “An Agony. As Now.” he writes:

I am inside someone
who hates me. I look
out from his eyes. Smell
what fouled tunes come in
to his breath. Love his
wretched woman. (*Baraka Reader* 52)

In this poem, Jones is struggling with his choices in life, with marrying a white woman, and with his place as a lone pepper flake in a sea of salt-white faces. He is self-loathing while at the same time participating in a world that is filled with disillusioned souls like him. Even though he related to the lifestyle of these “bohemians” Jones was still not one of them and like the poem suggests he felt that there are two of him, enacting W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness.” According to Jones’ own color class system, he was “brown” wanting to be both “black” and yet being content with being “yellow.” He was conflicted: “Yet as wild as some of my colleagues were and as cool as I usually was, the connection could be made because I was black and that made me, as Wright’s novel asserted, *an outsider*. (To some extent, even inside those ‘outsider’ circles)” (*Baraka, Autobiography* 230).

Jones received a good deal of coverage and recognition as a poet and editor because of his networking skills and his ability to slip between the various schools of poetry. He credits his success at being in-between all worlds and still a part of them all to his holding no grudges. "I moved from one circle to the other," Jones writes, "effortlessly, because I sincerely had no ax to grind but the whole of new poetry" (Baraka, *Autobiography* 234). Above all the schools of poetry Jones was involved in (The Black Mountain Poets, The New York School, etc.), he felt at home most with the Beats because of their lower social economic status. Jones liked the fact that the Beats lived mostly on the Lower East Side, which was the poorer side of Manhattan. There weren't many artists living in the Lower East Side, which contrasted with the more expensive Village scene with artists that came from well-to-do families and lived in bigger apartments. "The Beats were more 'pad' people or 'On The Road' and more into bush smoking than boozing" (234). Jones also connected with the Beats on a spiritual level, much like Kerouac and his Buddhist Catholicism; Jones is searching for that connection to something greater. He finds that connection through jazz; it is something holy. Both Jones and Kerouac believe in its ability to change the world, but while Kerouac is turning to it for its freedom dealing with language improvisation and freedom of rhythm, Jones is searching for a more direction connection to his own African American heritage.

Eric Mortenson sees both Kerouac and Jones' pull toward jazz as being a bridge to other worlds and "Both Kerouac and Baraka [Jones] believe in challenging the social order through the redemptive power of jazz-influenced

art. By invoking the concept of shared ancestry, however, Baraka offers what Kerouac cannot: an overtly political reconception of spatiality that is less complicit in the reigning spatial paradigm" (51-52). Jones excelled at making his jazz poetry a political statement and he learned from the Beats that poetry could speak for the underclasses of America with a rhythm created from the brothels of New Orleans and the underground clubs of Chicago and the streets of Harlem. It is what Jones would take with him when he would become Amiri Baraka. The jazz aesthetic that he had grown up with is what Jones weaves in with the Black music of his grandmother or as Mortenson writes, "Baraka attempts to achieve authenticity through a judicious blending of the spiritual with the material that he finds in the African American jazz aesthetic" (69). Spirituality, not religiosity is what Jones was looking for in jazz and poetry, and although at this point in his life he had not yet found Islam and the Black Arts Movement, he had a strong pull toward finding a spirituality that would help him transcend poems about flowers and sidewalks and instead talk about something that mattered. Jones had an ever-growing desire to help to change the society he saw as racist and cruel, especially for people of color.

Jones needed a reconnection with his African American roots and so he turned to Black and African music, but still he needed more. He needed something to write about when his life was not enough, and so he found solace in his blackness. For LeRoi Jones his ethnicity was a source of power he had never explored before, and for Jones "Ethnicity changes from a liability to an advantage: instead of seeing blackness as the site of oppression, it can become

the basis for a liberating poetics that endeavors to turn a supposed weakness into a fountain of strength" (Mortenson 70). In the late 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement was gaining more attention in the American consciousness and when he saw the power of the marches on Selma, he felt he needed to write against oppression. In a poem he wrote for Martin Luther King, Jr., Jones writes

*We have awaited the coming of a natural
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable
workers
of the land.
But none has come.
(Repeat)
But none has come.*

Will the machinegunners please step forward? (Baraka, *Autobiography* 237)

The transformation from jazz observations about his life to more political poems came at a time when Jones most successful as a magazine editor and a poet. Even as he mixed with the other jazz poets like Kenneth Patchen and Jack Micheline, Jones saw jazz as more than just a challenge to traditional academic poetic aesthetics; "Baraka [Jones] was interested in jazz's position at the seam between black and white culture, its status as a black-centered object of both white intellectual fascination and commercial commodification" (Gennari 256). Jones started to see that jazz poetry was being more widely used by "white" poets and wanted to bring it back to its roots of speaking for Black folks, so he decided to become more overt about race in his work. This pull toward a more

hardline political poetry was something that the Beats were already pulling toward. With Ginsberg helming the movement, the Beat Generation became more politically aggressive, but it still needed someone like LeRoi Jones or Bob Kaufman to push it toward a new Beat aesthetic, which would center race and social economic status as a core element to being a Beat poet.

Leroi Jones Opens The Door For The Beat Movement

Jazz has always been one of the driving aesthetics for Beat poetry and even though Hip Hop, Spoken Word, and Slam have supplanted much of the direct influence, it still remains a deep influence. From the Beat Generation to the Beat Movement, jazz remains a defining style to perform one's poetry. It is because of the experimentation that the early Beats did with jazz legends like Mingus and Parker that plenty of Beat poets today perform with jazz musicians or at least have musical accompaniment. As Mary Ellison proclaims, "Poets Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg had been among the many who read poetry over a jazz backing, but Baraka turned it into a magical art" (123). It was LeRoi Jones, Bob Kaufman, and Ted Joans who incorporated not only the jazz style but also jazz as a political statement in their work. It was the Beat Generation that brought jazz to a "white" middle-class audience, in a way that other poets and artists could not. They offered an interzone for cultures to mingle in and collaborate but yet could still go back to their respective cultural corners. For poets like LeRoi Jones the Beats were more accessible than the other groups because of their lower social-economic status and the fact that they actively

sought to write for the underprivileged through their voice. This was for Jones, something unique and “For Jones/Baraka the openness of culture (and its traditions) remains possible only when the structural incompleteness of the cultural fabric, its as yet unwoven threads are exploited through renewal ad infinitum. This cultural openness creates the space for the antagonistic but cooperative transactions between the self and the culture” (Muyumba 31). Where the Beat Generation had its limitations, the Beat Movement is more diverse in its interzone of cultures and styles that lend their influence to create new poetry and art. Jones, while only being associated with the Beats for a short while, had a lasting impact on the movement and continues to do so. Jones’ poetry and his publishing of many Beat poets made him a crucial figure to the continuity of the movement and its exposure to the world. Above all else, Eric Mortenson maintains, “Baraka argued that it was possible, through a reciprocal exchange between the modern African American artist and the alienated ‘young white American intellectual, artist, and Bohemian,’ to articulate an authentic black expressivity within an urban modernity. This hip subculture, comprising black Americans interested in Western artistic nonconformity and white Americans captivated by urban African American styles of music, dress, and speech, fashioned itself as a vanguard cultural force against the ‘shoddy cornucopia of popular American culture’” (397).

Part III: The Performance Is The Thing—Performing's Importance To Beat Poetry

If there is one legacy that the Beat Generation has left in this world, it is the poetry reading. David Henderson once said, "It must be remembered that for the Beats, the poetry reading was the national pastime, it was the major event of the day, above and beyond the formal jazz concert or art opening" (qtd. in Kaufman *Cranial Guitar* 11). Today, there are literally hundreds of poetry readings occurring across the world on a daily basis. Typing in "poetry reading" into the Google search engine in any city produces many results. The poetry reading, spoken word, and Slam all have their foundations in the Beat Generation. The performance of poetry has in recent times become a staple of being a poet. Today there are just as many albums of poetry readings as there are poetry books. Although poetry has been read aloud since poetry has been composed, it had in the past few hundred years become more textual than spoken. Taught to be read and written in big leather bound books, poetry was taught only to a privileged class. Before the Beats popularized the reading, most poetry readings involved only established authors like T.S. Eliot or W.B. Yeats and were largely academic affairs. In 1955 that all changed with the Six Gallery Reading in San Francisco. This poetry reading began a tradition of readings where poets would read works in progress, such as Ginsberg's "Howl," instead of polished works, and introduced the concept of the "open mic" where anyone could get up and read a poem. These poetry readings challenged the academic

approach to verse that had become popular in the 20th century and opened the door for performance as a viable attribute for being a poet.

The importance of performance in the Beat Movement creates a new aspect of study that is rarely addressed in traditional Beat scholarship. Performance adds an element of change that is not text based. As these Beat poets performed their poetry, they began to change how poetry readings were performed. As Diana Taylor writes:

Performances travel, challenging and influencing other performances. Yet there are, in a sense, always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them. This is/as underlines the understanding of performance as simultaneously “real” and “constructed,” as practices that bring together what have historically been kept separate as discrete, supposedly free-standing, ontological and epistemological discourses. (3)

This marrying of text and performance was becoming more popular when poets began to understand the power of poetry and its possible effect on audiences. The most prominent figures to pursue the importance of performance in Beat poetry are Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman, and Anne Waldman. All three speak of the importance of performance for poetry and much of that begins with a sense that poetry belongs to everyone. The simple act of performing poetry in converted garages and on street corners for free changed the narrative of the poetry reading and who its intended audience is supposed to be. Just as the jazz

musician understands the importance of audience participation through shouts of encouragement like chanting, “Go” and “ That’s it!” the Beats understood that this could be translated to the poetry reading. To further explain the change that the Beats had on spoken poetry, a short history of performance poetry is warranted.

A Short History Of Spoken Poetry In America

Poetry in the traditional academic sense was exclusive. There is secret knowledge trapped inside each poem and only certain people with the right key can unlock it and gain access. The key to unlocking that poem was a certain kind of education only available to the wealthy and that usually meant the “white” middle and upper class in America. The lock that held the poem’s knowledge trapped was a coded language of allusions, which refers to a specific knowledge of Greek or Latin history or a very specific understanding of the King’s James Bible. This poetry was extremely popular amongst many poets in the 19th and 20th Century and along with this type of poetry was the performance of poetry by trained actors and speakers. Leslie Wheeler in her book, *Voice American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s To the Present*, writes, “One of the most important contexts for the sounding of modern poetry was the prevalence of recitation by non-poets. Often this was a private activity, entertaining a family or small circle of friends, but it can also be a highly public exercise” (4). The reading of a poet’s work by a non-poet was quite common in the late 19th and early 20th century and many actors made their living travelling

the world reading a certain poets' work with the poet sitting next to the reader. "Often these performances were promotional," Wheeler writes, "Robert Frost's 'first reading,' for example, featured the poet's work read by a supporter to a banquet of a Men's League, while Frost 'cowered' in a corner" (4). Because of this style of poetry reading, which was hugely popular, the writing of poetry was not necessarily considerate of the sound of poetry.

The role of orality in poetry had for centuries been essential, but as the performance and writing were separated, the poetry became more abstract and dense. The elimination of the oral aspect of poetry was taught widely in the schoolhouse and was learned well by most poets and writers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. According to Joan Shelley Rubin's *Songs of Ourselves: The Use of Poetry in America*:

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, learning poetry in the American school entailed both silent reading and speaking. Much of the former consisted in acquiring "a body of facts" about authors and literary movements. Reading a poem also meant studying it: deciphering unfamiliar vocabulary, attending to technicalities of meter and rhyme, mastering the spelling and grammar lessons the text provided. (108)

Poetry was a lesson in better understanding the language, and it taught children the idea that poetry was supposed to be difficult to understand. In many ways it was taught that poetry was helping children learn critical thinking, which it was to a certain degree, but it was teaching a certain prescribed poetics that favored the written text over the spoken word. As Rubin writes, poetry "was

supposed to enhance patriotism, 'instill virtue', convey 'the value of discipline,' and with the advent of progressive education in the thirties, encourage self-expression" (107). The encouraging of self-expression though was only meant to be on paper, not spoken aloud. In many ways this teaching of poetry as read and not heard continues today in classrooms all around America. For many of the Beats, especially the early Beats, this was the poetry that they were exposed to in the educational system. This is one reason why they turned to different traditions of poetry (particularly music) and jazz for inspiration for changing the narrative on what poetry was supposed to be.

In the history of performing poetry, there was a sea change in the performance of poetry that took place in the 1920s with the rise of radio and the Harlem Renaissance. As radio became more a fixture of everyday life, people wanted to hear the poet's own voice read their work. Vachel Lindsey was a poet who would perform with musical accompaniment. Throughout the early 1900s, Lindsey would introduce chants and songs into his poetry and even performed with drums. (see Hummer) Because of this trend poets like Carl Sandburg and Edna St. Vincent Millay gained theatrical training and began to perform what they referred to as "platform performances." As Leslie Wheeler writes, "For these poets, words were utterly grounded in bodies and hence in culture and politics; their self-presentations emphasized these connections" (8). Sandburg, in particular, mixed together a lecture/recitation approach to his performances, and even Robert Frost picked up on this technique employing more of a conversational style to his delivery. This began to pick up as these poets began

to recite their own work, forcing the poet to rely on her/his own voice to promote her/his work. However, performances did not pay as much as book sales and so they still wrote their work with a text-based mentality.

The Harlem Renaissance poets began to challenge the text-based poetry and the language that it promoted by writing and reading their own work in African American vernacular. For the poets of the Harlem Renaissance this technique would reach a larger African American audience much better than writing in academic language. The “traditional” allusion-filled poetry would turn away most poor and undereducated African Americans and for the Harlem Renaissance that was their target audience. Perhaps the most popular of the Harlem Renaissance poet-performers was Langston Hughes because he tailored his performances to suit his audiences specifically. For example, when “Speaking to blacks in the South, Hughes assumed a role familiar to these audiences: the travelling preacher” (Wheeler 9). Also, while booking mostly black junior colleges and technical schools for his readings instead of Ivy League institutions, he would sell his broadsides and poetry books for twenty-five cents. This was a practice that created a larger literate African American community, and as he did these tours, he began to write what he referred to as “recitations” because as Hughes once wrote, “I have felt that much of our poetry has been aimed at the heads of the high-brows, rather than at the hearts of the people” (Davey 225). As Elizabeth Daley writes in her article, “Building A Black Audience in the 1930s,” “When Langston Hughes decided to write ‘recitations’ to read and sell during his tour, he entered a tradition of reading poems aloud

for education or entertainment—a tradition stretching back to the very origins of poetry but with a specific history of use in the United States” (229). This specific history is one that was reserved for mostly slave spirituals and folksongs, but because of the success of the Harlem Renaissance, it was becoming more accepted for listening audiences. Although this did not become standard for most poets in America, it was certainly acknowledged by poets around the world and one in particular: Dylan Thomas.

In 1950 Thomas launched his reading tour across America, which would set the precedent that poets could read their work in their own voices and attract massive attention from everyone in the poetry world. Dylan Thomas gained the reputation through his lifetime of a poet who lived and died in the streets. His recordings were widely popular and his hard-living attitude toward life made him more of a phenomenon. As Adam Kirsch writes in *“Reckless Endangerment: The Making and Unmaking of Dylan Thomas,”* “What makes him unique among poets, even famous poets, is this distinctly modern and American cast of his celebrity. He took part in the savage transaction of stardom: his reckless self-indulgence satisfied his audiences’ fantasies, and his destruction satisfied their moralistic envy. Many people shared an obscure sense of gratification that Thomas had died young, as a poet should” (89). In a sense, it showed many poets that they could travel like rock stars and people would listen. Thomas’ poems often had a lyrical quality to them because they were “composed on the tongue” as Allen Ginsberg would say. It was poetry designed to be heard just as much as read. This tour certainly changed the nature of poets

and the reading of poetry in America, for many poets were now forced to read their own work and be aware of their performance. But what perhaps had the greatest effect on American performing poets was the Six Gallery Reading that took place on October 7, 1955.

Six Angels At The Holy Garage: The Six Gallery Reading

On that gloomy gray night in San Francisco, the Beat Generation was born in a converted garage that was being used as an art gallery. The history of poetic success is usually marked by publications, but every once in awhile there is a performance that changes everything. The Six Gallery reading was that performance. "If there had not been a Six Gallery reading, there would not have been an ongoing Beat Generation," Michael McClure writes in his recount of that night in *Scratching the Beat Surface* (McClure 23). The Six Gallery reading was the performance that the Beat Generation was born out of and has become myth. This reading would set the framework for the importance of performance for Beat work. The Six Gallery reading broke several traditions for poetry readings. The first was that it had a lineup of mostly unknown poets at the time: Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder. Only Philip Lamantia was a known poet of the Bay Area; the rest came from all over, Ginsberg being the poet from the farthest corner: New York.

Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac did much of the planning and organizing for this event, which consisted of flyers and walking the streets telling everyone they knew about the event. It was Korean War veteran Wally

Hedrick who had a converted garage turned art gallery on Fillmore Street who first suggested the reading. He wanted Ginsberg to organize a poetry reading for his gallery and at first Ginsberg was reluctant because he was thinking of a traditional reading with established poets and admission at the door, but it was Kerouac who convinced Ginsberg that it should be an outsider's event, since they were outsiders themselves (Raskin 13-14). It didn't take much coercion for Ginsberg to set out and create a revolutionary new type of reading, much of which was inspired by Walt Whitman who pioneered free verse and the long line. In the essay, "The Literary Revolution in America," Allen Ginsberg writes:

This was no ordinary poetry reading. Indeed, it resembled anything but a poetry reading. The reading was such a violent and beautiful expression of their revolutionary individuality (a quality bypassed in American poetry since the formulations of Whitman), conducted with such surprising abandon and delight by the poets themselves, and presenting such a high mass of beautiful unanticipated poetry, that the audience, expecting some Bohemian stupidity, was left stunned, and the poets were left with the realization that they were fated to make a permanent change in the literary firmament of the States. (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 240)

The reading was MC'ed or presided over by Kenneth Rexroth, known as the resident Bohemian poet of San Francisco, a generation older than the poets reading. Ginsberg thought Rexroth was the perfect person to usher in a new era of poetry and Rexroth treated this reading as such. With Kerouac in the

audience taking up a collection for wine and passing the jug around the room chanting, "Glug a slug from the jug, man" (Raskin 15), Kerouac roused the audience from its stiff demeanor and loosened them up. Kerouac treated this night like a jazz concert and often whistled and shouted, "Go," to the poets performing. According to Raskin, "He [Kerouac] was Ginsberg's co-conspirator, the essential link between the performers on stage and the people in the audience. It was Kerouac who helped break down the barriers" (8). Before the reading took place and Ginsberg was in the midst of advertising the event, "[Gary] Snyder predicted that the Six Gallery reading would be a 'poetickall bombshell'" (Raskin 2) and so it was for everyone involved.

The reading had an affect on the performers as well as the audience that no one was expecting. In 1999 Snyder would be asked about that night and he responded by saying, "That event launched all of us. It launched Allen Ginsberg, of course, and Phil Whalen and Michael McClure and Jack Kerouac. After the Six Gallery, poetry readings became regular cultural events not only in this country but all over the world" (Raskin 7). It was the sea change in poetry that did more for changing how poetry was written than the publication of *Howl*. Allen Ginsberg said that the reading was meant to "defy the system of academic poetry, official reviews, New York publishing machinery, national sobriety and generally-accepted standards to good taste" (Raskin 13). It even changed the way the poets reading that night would write their poetry. "The Six Gallery reading was a direct and deliberate response to the culture of the bomb and to American power and wealth," (Raskin 3) and it did just that.

One person affected in particular by this reading was Michael McClure, who would go on to write the book *Scratching the Beat Surface: Essays on New Vision From Blake to Kerouac*, which would recount how this night changed his view of poetry from that point on: "I was twenty-two years old. The reading was an initiating event. Then and there, I set my belief in poetry as a truthful and adventurous art. It was important, I realized, to stand up in front of an audience and not write ivory tower quatrains that would gather dust in books" (McClure 76). For the first time, McClure understood the power of the spoken word, but it was one poem in particular that would become infamous as the poem that destroyed America; that poem was Allen Ginsberg's "Howl."

It would be from Ginsberg's reading of "Howl: Part I" at the Six Gallery that would catch Lawrence Ferlinghetti's attention and he would offer Ginsberg a publication deal. Ferlinghetti had recently started a small press called City Lights Books and he was looking for a truly revolutionary work to be in his new pocket book series and *Howl and Other Poems* was just that book. Ferlinghetti decided on Ginsberg because of the impact that the reading of "Howl" had on the audience. McClure recalled his hearing Ginsberg read "Howl" for the first time:

In all of our memories no one had been so outspoken in poetry before—we had gone beyond a point of no return—and we were ready for it, for a point of no return. None of us wanted to go back to the gray, chill, militaristic silence, to the intellectual void—to the land without poetry—to the spiritual drabness. We wanted to make it new and we wanted to

invent it and the process of it as we went into it. We wanted voice and we wanted vision. (13)

For the people there that night, “Howl” seemed to give them permission to write poetry that mattered again. It was a wakeup call to all artists that art and poetry could make a difference in society. What makes this a departure from many great poems like Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* or T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* was that it was famous for first being heard before it was read. Ginsberg had not finished writing, “Howl” and so what was heard on that night in October was only the first part. It was a work-in-progress that would certainly set a precedent for poetry readings from that point on.

The Six Gallery would give birth to a new poetry scene that would inspire new poets to create new poetry readings with inexperienced poets and poets reading works-in-progress. The open mic would be born out of what occurred on October 7, 1955, and a new form of poetry would be formed: Spoken Word. Billy Collins in the introduction to *The Spoken Word Revolution* writes, “And more than any other link to the present-day era, Allen Ginsberg’s 1956² Gallery Six reading of ‘Howl’ leads into today’s performance poetry. Although not a direct link in terms of style, certainly the Beat readings were a seedling in the importance of reading poetry aloud” (12). From that moment on, poets around the world saw the potential of reading poetry aloud and a revolution of style and execution would begin to occur that challenged the academic approach.

The Birth Of Spoken Word And The Practice Of Poetry

The Beat Generation was forever grounded in performance and no one was as deeply invested in the performance of poetry than Allen Ginsberg. He would study performance from all over the world: from Indian mantras to Jewish chants and especially song. Even later in life, Ginsberg would incorporate singing exercises into poetry classes as a way to teach his students about the importance of hearing poetry. In one of his lectures, Ginsberg said,

There's a quiet conversational poetry, and there's a whispered poetry, and I guess whispered transmissions even, but that area of full energy is very rarely appreciated now. It's appreciated when you hear it; when you hear it in Dylan, it's totally appreciated, which is the great thing about Dylan—he puts his whole lung in one vowel; “How does it FEEL,” or as in old blues, “HOME, I’m going HOME,” so you have the whole body into it because what is meant is something very definite emotionally, rather than tentative. (Ginsberg, *Composed* 107)

His attention to sounding each syllable was very important to Ginsberg. He even chose to use the musician Bob Dylan to illustrate his point, whose style was the most influenced by the Beats despite their declared affinity to jazz.

Much of the Beat style of poetry is grounded in musical styles like jazz as discussed before, but also the blues, rock n’ roll, and folk music. For Ginsberg, music and poetry were sibling art forms and sometimes were fraternal twins. Ginsberg understood that music did as much for poetry as poetry did for music: “The spoken aspect of poetry was submerged for many years in America after

the restraint of Eliotic New Critics, and the exuberance of spoken American-ese was discouraged. But where it had play in blues, lyrics, or Woody Guthrie, or the Rolling Stones, poetry emerged and dominated an element of consciousness in America and spread around the world as part of a huge political revolution" (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 182). Through musicians like Bob Dylan and John Lennon, poetry played a strong role in popular music written in the 1960s. Beat poetry came out of jazz and went into Dylan and the Beatles with a connection that would be unprecedented in American history. Allen Ginsberg would tour with Bob Dylan reading poetry, Jack Kerouac would record his spoken word albums with jazz legends Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, and Beat figures would end up on the cover of the iconic Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. William S. Burroughs would be touted as the godfather of punk rock taking in several rock musicians under his influence like Patti Smith and Lou Reed. But perhaps the greatest reciprocating influence between music and poetry was the use of vernacular in both styles. When Ginsberg once asked Dylan what was his greatest poetic literary influence and Dylan answered Jack Kerouac's *Mexico City Blues*. So Ginsberg asked him why and Dylan answered, "[I]t was the first poetry that spoke his own language" (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 374). Jack Kerouac's poetry opened Dylan's eyes to a new poetics that could capture the language of the streets and still be poetic.

Throughout his career Ginsberg would often credit spoken language as his most influential stylistic element. In describing his poetry, Ginsberg said, "My method of writing follows my mentors, Jack Kerouac and William Carlos

Williams, who wrote in spoken American-ese, in living speech" (*Deliberate Prose* 182). It is living speech that is the foundation of the Spoken Word movement, since many Spoken Word poems can sound very much like short monologues and has often been discounted as rants. Spoken Word takes free verse to its very limits because of the belief in the power of the *spoken* word. The power of the spoken word is a principle that is a key element in the Beat Movement that was born at the Six Gallery and continued through poets like Bob Kaufman, Anne Waldman, and Bobbie Louise Hawkins. Fellow Beat poet Bobbie Louise Hawkins said of the importance of language in poetry, "Language is a living thing—it lives in us—we *host* language. Words are born into our vocabularies, live and die there. And the *lively* words do not stay still, are not mannerly, do not so much 'hold' information as spill it, stain the environs in which they occur—the *sound* of our spoken sentences, the 'silent' sounding of thought in our heads and of the sentences we put onto paper" (Waldman, *Disembodied Poetics* 149). Language and performance are central to the curriculum of *The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics* where Hawkins taught.

Anne Waldman is perhaps one of the most active links between the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement because Waldman is a transitional figure herself. In late 1974, along with Allen Ginsberg, young Beat poet Anne Waldman founded *The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics* at Naropa University in Denver, Colorado. Anne Waldman, herself a formidable poet is highly influential in the promotion and execution of performance in poetry. In an interview, Anne Waldman said,

There's inherent rhythm in the language, and I like to punctuate the consonants and draw out the syllables and extend the whole range of sound in my own way. Ambience of the room and audience is a factor. No two performances are alike, they are not rehearsed. But they are rituals in a sense. Language acts become re-done, and meant to conjure states of mind and possibilities, and to wake people up to poetry as an active condition. As an experience in and of itself. The point is to get to the immediacy of the sound and meaning and the various psychological states the words embolden. (Xin 2)

In an academic setting, Anne Waldman has done more than most for the study of performing poetry and the study of the importance of language. Although Waldman's style often borrows from the Buddhist traditions, it is still very much influenced by Ginsberg's dedication to language as it is heard today.

In her poem, "Show You out the Door," Waldman illustrates her dedication to speaking the language of today:

I wanted to write a walking around poem
beginning with a trip to the Museum, Fifth Avenue was always wide
Was "Zone" influenced by Walt Whitman?
someone asked in Anselm Hollo's lecture class
in the distant school
which went from Apollinaire to Jack Spicer

Could the poets we love exist in one school? (*Outrider* 190)

Here Waldman is connecting an everyday experience of walking down the street to her poetic influences and asking a question in a conversational style. This poem, composed on the tongue, pays more attention to the delivery of the poem than to how it reads on the page. There is a repetition of words that when reading it on the page seems excessive because of the repeating of “was” in the second and third lines, but when spoken aloud, the lines flow lyrically and natural such as listening into a conversation. This is something that is important to Waldman’s poetry and her attention to performance. In an interview about her poetry, Anne Waldman once said, “The text has to ‘call out’ and guide the reader to ways of reading and performing. There should be an intuition guiding the process. That the text be brought alive in the moment of rendering. And that the poet cannot ‘own’ the text at this point. That it becomes a kind of offering or occasion that cuts into time and space, that intervenes on the public landscape” (Xin 4). This linking of text and performance has been at the center of the continuous of the Beat Movement in modern poetry and nowhere is it more prominent than in Slam.

Slamming Those Beats: The Slam Poetry Movement

In the 1980s poetry was seeing a wavering of interest from the young and working class and many poets recognized that poetry needed revitalization. The Beat Generation had become part of the mainstream consciousness of American poetry and the traditional poetry reading had become a stale. The open mic, which had been revolutionary in the 1960s and 70s, was now common

practice and so a new approach to poetry was sorely needed. This revitalization occurred when a young poet by the name of Marc Smith came up with a new idea about how to approach the poetry reading. Smith decided to approach poetry like a competition sport, borrowed from previous Beat inspired events like the Taos Poetry Circus that pitted two poets together in a boxing match slinging poems at each other usually inside a boxing ring. Smith's idea was different in that it did not require a performer to be a practicing poet, but simply someone who could say what she/he wanted in three and a half minutes.

According to Gary Mex Glazner, "In 1986, Marc Smith started the Poetry Slam in Chicago with the idea of giving the audience a voice, letting the audience say if they liked a poem. By cultivating their participation, poetry slams build an audience for poetry, bringing everyday workers, bus drivers, waitresses, and cops to a poetry reading and letting them cut loose" (11). This type of reading would gather a list of poets reading and judges would be chosen from the audience. The judges are usually random audience members and often were past Slam champions. The Slam harkens back to the Six Gallery reading because as Kerouac participated in the reading with shouts of encouragement and "Yes" and "Go's." "I was the one who got things jumping," Kerouac wrote in *The Dharma Bums* (145). This statement could easily be said of a Slam Poetry audience member. Even though the Slam has judges the winner of a Poetry Slam is usually chosen by the audiences "Ooo's" and "Aaahh's." The audience is even encouraged to boo if they think a performer is particularly bad.

This particular form of poetry caught like wildfire and became widely popular, giving rise to a new type of poet where poems are memorized and meant to be performed rather than written. Memorization becomes a key component to Slam and Spoken Word, which divorces the poet from the page and changes the poems to be more orally based. Because of this the Slam Poet makes CDs and does not write poetry books; this is performance poetry taken to its ultimate limits. Slam responded to what Leslie Wheeler sees as the depreciation of written poetry in America:

As its audiences shrank, poetry became even more intensely an art of authenticity, representing the opposite of the polished, distant televised world. This authentic poet-performer emerged as if suddenly in the 1950s, when, to cite the most famous example, Allen Ginsberg awed crowds with his chanting of "Howl"; that generation's revulsion against modernist impersonality demonstrated itself partly through oral performance, in which the person of the poet, passionately rebellious, is salient (even naked in a few infamous cases). (Wheeler 12)

Slam filled a void in the connection between African American music and poetry. The 1980s saw the rise of Hip Hop and Rap in the African American communities. Slam borrows heavily from Hip Hop and Rap, but while these particular styles rely on music, Slam poets rely solely on their words. John Gehring in his article, "Outsiders' Art: Slam Poetry Has Gotten Students Who Are Often Bored With How The Subject Is Taught In School Excited About The Craft" writes, "Slam borrows heavily from the rhythms and wordplay of rap

and hip-hop, as well as the stream of consciousness and metaphysical musings of Beat generation poets. It's raw, edgy, and delivered with an attitude that says "revolution through words is possible" (2). Slam has attracted people to poetry that would not have ever thought of becoming poets. In many ways, it is what the Beat Generation strove to achieve in society, a poetry that unites all classes and races of people; "Slam is home to the bohemian white kid who bemoans suburban life; the black kid from the inner city sick of gang killings; the Latina paying respect to a mother who earns a living scrubbing other people's floors; the Asian teen struggling with sexual identity" (Gehring 7). As much as Slam has been effective for recruiting young people to poetry, even gaining popular attention with the HBO show, *Def Poetry Jam*, it still remains a controversial art form.

As a form of poetry it is limiting in form because of its time constraints and its main purpose is to win the audience's approval. Emotional appeal becomes the key element to Slam Poetry, which is both its strength and weakness for its content is usually personal and dramatic. As much debate as there is about the validity of Slam in the poetry world, its effect is indisputable. Because of Slam and Spoken Word, all poetry has had to alter its delivery and approach. "Oral publication is tremendously important in contemporary poetry," writes Lesley Wheeler. "As other critics have observed, a poet who succeeds as a performer, whether on slam or academic circuits, in bars or independent bookstores or festivals, probably reaches far more listeners through readings than readers through book sales. Embodied voices attract audiences"

(Wheeler 129). Poets reading their own work has become such a staple of being a poet that most do not realize that this was not always so. The performing of poetry in American history is at its peak and seems to be growing more with every generation. Slam and its appeal has much to do with this trend, especially with programs like *Poetry Out Loud*, a high school poetry reading competition and the *National Slam Championships* which air on ESPN and HBO respectively. As long as young people can see other young people performing their own work on television and the Internet, there will be a precedent for others to take up poetry. This endeavor for poetry to be a continuing practice is something that the Beat Generation began all those years ago in 1955 and with the continuous Beat Movement.

Poetry Poetry Poetry!!! Continuing A Social Movement Through Performance

Throughout his later years, Ginsberg would spend much of his time teaching, either at Brooklyn College or the Naropa University. Ginsberg with the help of Anne Waldman started a creative writing program called *The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics* located at the Naropa University. It would be the culmination of his life's work to continue to birth new poets with the Beat philosophy. In his classes, orality would be a major point of interest because as Ginsberg believed, "'Good poetry' is either visual clarity, melodic rondure, or language play that is exuberant and amusing, plus some sense of grounded seriousness and emotion, which usually is manifested in the sight, sound, or intellect of the work, and ultimately the sense that the author is purposing to

relieve the mass of human suffering” (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 183).

Throughout his teachings, Ginsberg was well aware of the rising Spoken Word movement happening in the streets around the world. Spoken Word affected how he taught poetry, but he never lost sight of the Beat Generation principle that poetry should not just be for self-gratification, but to affect social change.

The major distinction between Beat poetry and Spoken Word besides differences in style is the Beat dedication to social change. Ginsberg was certainly wary of poetry being mainstreamed and the effect that could have to its social effectiveness; “All over the country there are mushrooming poetry slams, readings and poetry cafes, and even a resurgence of interest in San Francisco Renaissance and Beat poetry, to a point that it has become commercialized” (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 183). Since Ginsberg wrote those words in 1994, something occurred that Ginsberg was not able to see come to fruition in his own lifetime.

The rise of the Beat Movement in America’s popular consciousness occurred around 2008, ten years after the death of one of its most influential architects. The Beat Movement, although never truly gone, began to reemerge as a cohesive movement in a time of political and social strife, starting with the election of Barack Obama, the rise of the Tea Party, the passing of SB 1070 (the Arizona anti-Immigration Law), and the Occupy Wall Street movement. The increased political, racial, and social tensions brought out these poets to respond to the social climate. This movement drew direct connections to the Beat Generation and with its reinvigorated mission toward social action came a

mixture of performance poets, traditional page poets, spoken word artist, slammers, and fresh new open mic poets reading for the first time. Many of these poets credit their influences back to jazz and mix their performances with music, which is perhaps the most influential art form to the Beat Movement. The poetic elements established by the Beat Generation through the performing of their own work and being socially conscious continues to thrive in the Beat Movement. Mostly what the performance of poetry does for the Beat Movement is help to create a community of artists that continues to create new artists. The Beats have always evolved with each new performance; they have never been static just as jazz is never static and as performance continues to change poetry, so must Beat poetry continue to keep on riffing.

CHAPTER IV

ALL MY FRIENDS ARE WRITING TO CHANGE THE WORLD: THE
RELATIONSHIPS THAT MAKE THE BEAT COMMUNITY

A sense of community has always been strong amongst the Beats from its early inception to its current incarnation. Community is perhaps the element that has remained constant and unchanging for being “Beat,” but what makes a community? Is it relationships, a social philosophy, a place, or an outlet? For the Beat Generation it was wall all of these things. Allen Ginsberg once wrote in his journal, “Fortunately art is a community effort—a small but select community living in a spiritualized world endeavoring to interpret the wars and the solitudes of the flesh” (*Journals: Early Fifties* 78). Ginsberg gained a sense of community from his time spent at Columbia University in the late 1940s. It was the friendships he made there that would define the Beat Generation’s community. At Columbia Ginsberg and Kerouac would meet and become lifelong friends along with William S. Burroughs and many others. The meeting and constant interaction of these figures was due to two women, Joan Vollmer and Edie Parker. It would be in Joan Vollmer’s apartment that the Beat Generation would be born and a community would form.

From the early days in 1940s New York in Joan Vollmer’s apartment to the Co-Existence Bagel Shop in San Francisco in the 1950s, to the Greenwich Village scene that spawned the Mimeograph Revolution of the 1960s, and to the Spoken Word scenes of today, a sense of being committed to each other as a

collective unit has been a driving force behind the Beats' success. Michael McClure writes, "There were small communities that were self-exiled so to speak; they comprised artists and dissenters who supported and stood up for one another, believed in one another, and were not living the conformity and political commandments or following the morés, but doing things their own way, living much like some people manage today, and as a matter of fact, with considerably more freedom" (Waldman, *Beats at Naropa* 15). The Beats offered a banner under which artists, and in particular poets, could work together to promote their work as well as everyone else's in the community. In perhaps the best example of community is Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl," which serves as the first poetic description of the Beat community. The poem, "Howl," is designed as a tribute to all of his friends beginning with the line, "I have seen the best minds of my generation" (*Collected Poems* 209) and then proceeding to list them all. This poem when first read struck a chord with all present and helped to establish a Beat community. Although not unique to the Beat Generation, poetic and literary communities continue to exist as a collective of writers, artists, etc., but what makes the Beats unique is their impact on the social fabric of America. The Beat Generation has permeated itself in the fabric of American consciousness in a way that had never been done before. The concept of the Beat Generation spawned the "beatnik," the "hipster," and eventually the "hippie," but the influence did not stop there. The Beat influence has given birth to the "spoken word artist" and the "slammer." Through all of these incarnations there has always existed a community that fostered the Beat

ideals of speaking for the underclasses. They have also given rise to the use of performance in their work, but they have done it as a community of artists under the banner and influence of “Beat.” In his essay, “On the Origin of the Beat Generation” Kerouac wrote,

The word ‘beat’ originally meant poor, down and out, dead-beat, on the bum, sad, sleeping in subways. Now that the word is belonging officially it is being made to stretch to include people who do not sleep in subways but have a new gesture, or attitude, which I can only describe as a new *more*. ‘Beat Generation’ has simply become a slogan or label for a revolution in manners in America. (Kerouac, *Good Blonde* 42)

From the Beat Generation to the Beat Movement, there has been a thread of influence from the constant influence of its core engineer, Allen Ginsberg.

The Beats have engineered a movement of poetry scenes that continue to this day, by creating a movement that is designed to constantly generate new poetry. As Ginsberg writes, “That we have begun a revolution of literature in America, again, without meaning to, merely by the actual practice of poetry—this would be inevitable. No doubt we knew what we were doing” (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 253). Ginsberg did his work of promoting not only himself, but also many poets and writers, including fellow Beat legends Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Gregory Corso. But Ginsberg was not alone in his promotion of the movement; there were others like Bob Kaufman and Ed Sanders that worked to continue the practice of Beat poetry through various forms of community. A Beat community was formed from simple gatherings of

friends to the promotion of writers through the publication of magazines and small presses. They were also instrumental in the formation of schools like Anne Waldman's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, as well as the promotion of Slams and Spoken Word Readings. Each of these various elements helped to foster a community of Beat poets that continues the vision of Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Generation.

Part I: The Beat Incubator: Joan Vollmer's Apartment And The Birth Of The Beat Generation

In order to better understand the importance of community for the Beats, a revisitation of the birth of the Beat Generation is warranted. Allen Ginsberg in Barry Gifford's *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, names the primary members of the early Beat circle: "New York in the forties. Well, the main scene, I think, where everybody met—that is to say, Burroughs, Kerouac, myself, Herbert Huncke, Neal Cassady, Joan Vollmer Adams Burroughs, Ed White, Hal Chase, [John] Clellon Holmes, Ed Stringham of *The New Yorker* magazine, Alan Harrington, started around Christmas '43" (34). This unusual bunch of characters comprised what Ginsberg so eloquently called "the main scene" (qtd. in Gifford & Lee 34), but what was this main scene? The main scene was comprised of the frequent patrons of 419 115th Street Apartment 62 or more commonly know as Joan Vollmer's apartment. Joan Vollmer is perhaps the most important invisible figure of the Beat Generation. She is in many ways responsible for the creation of the Beat Generation, not simply because it was

birthed in her living room but because of her influence on the movement's philosophy and on many of the Beat Generation writers.

Introducing Joan Vollmer

The only memories that Billy Burroughs, Jr. had of his mother was a drunken car ride with Lucien Carr at the wheel, driving erratically down a dusty Mexican road, while she egged him on, "How fast can this heap go?" Billy and his sister Julie lay cramped down in the backseat with a very concerned Allen Ginsberg trying to calm them. The only other clear memory that Billy had of his mother is "walking behind his mother up the steps to their apartment [in Mexico City], and thinking that her calves were sort of heart-shaped" (T. Morgan. 215). Being only four years old when his father, William S. Burroughs, Sr., fatally wounded his mother, Billy did not ever really get to know his mother, but her memory haunted him for the bulk of his short life. This seems to be the legacy of Joan Vollmer Adams Burroughs. Throughout the Beat world, she is remembered as influential and important, but only scenes and brief descriptions are given. Allen Ginsberg notes her as being the catalytic reason for his writing "Howl" and William S. Burroughs stated in his introduction to *Queer*, "I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan's death" (xi). As for Kerouac, she is a character or is at least mentioned in several of his books, yet very little is known of this intelligent, tragic woman.

Joan Vollmer was born in Albany, New York, the first-born daughter to David W. and Dorothy H. Vollmer. According to a 1930 census, David Vollmer

hailed from Wisconsin and listed his occupation as a chemist.³ David Vollmer worked for the General Aniline Corporation in Rensselaer, New York, directly across the Hudson River from Albany. General Aniline was a chemical company that made chemicals for film stock that had a German parent company. Dorothy H. Vollmer was a housewife and mother of two. She clashed with her daughter on many different matters and their very different interests left them estranged throughout Joan's short life (see Kerouac-Parker). In many ways, Joan Vollmer took after her father and loved to argue and discuss intellectual subjects. Although, she did not approve of their upper middle-class lifestyle, she would remain close to her father and her younger brother, David Jr.

Joan attended the Episcopal St. Agnes Private School in Albany. While there, she excelled at her class work, earning her a diploma at the age of sixteen and a \$500 scholarship to Barnard College⁴ (the sister school to Columbia University) in New York City. Joan rejoiced in leaving her suburban existence for the dream of liberation and education in one of the world's greatest cities. In 1939, Joan Vollmer left her upper-class existence in Loudonville for New York City and Barnard College. One of the major myths about Joan Vollmer was that she graduated with honors from Barnard College; she did not. Joan Vollmer arrived in New York City and quickly became involved with a Columbia law student, Paul Adams. By the end of the fall semester, she was expelled from Barnard for, as a note on her transcript states, "she eloped with a Mr. Adams." She did not completely give up pursuing her own education after she was

married because from 1941 – 42, Joan Vollmer attended the University Extension division of Columbia University, which was a continuing education school that allowed women and minorities to take general education non-credit based courses. Joan lived with Paul Adams as husband and wife until 1941 when Adams went off to war. While Adams was away at war, Joan met Edie Parker, later known as Edie Kerouac-Parker, Jack Kerouac's first wife.

Joan Vollmer met Edie Parker at the West End Bar on the corner of 114th Street and Broadway, just south of Columbia University. The West End Bar, also known as "The West End Gate," was the popular waterhole for Columbia students. From the first moment they met, Joan Vollmer and Edie Parker recognized kindred spirits in each other. Edie Parker was completely taken by Joan Vollmer's intellect and Joan was enamored by Edie Parker's liberated spirit, especially in matters of love. They became fast friends, and since at this point in Joan's life, she had a large apartment all to herself, they decided to become roommates. In 1943, Joan would give up her apartment on 118th Street and move into apartment #28 at 420 West 119th Street with Edie Parker and Jack Kerouac (See Miles' *Kerouac*). Although still married to Paul Adams, Joan Vollmer Adams would continue to live her life as a bachelorette. She enjoyed the nightlife that Manhattan had to offer and she was often looking for "cocksmen." The term "cocksmen" was what Joan Vollmer referred to as men whose only use was sex. It is not clear how faithful she was to Paul Adams throughout her marriage because when Edie Parker met her, she was already chasing prospects.

Late in Edie Parker's life, she wrote "Remembering Mrs. William Seward Burroughs, Joan Vollmer Adams," which details the time in her life with Joan and the impact she made on the early Beats. Kerouac would immortalize Joan in first novel, *The Town and the City*, also in *On the Road* as Burroughs' wife and in *Visions of Cody* Kerouac and Cassady would discuss Joan living in a secluded farm in New Waverly, Texas. Possibly the most famous reference to Joan is in Kerouac's *Vanity of Dulouz*. In that novel, June's (Joan's) soldier-husband, fresh from the front, comes back to their apartment to find Kerouac, Burroughs, Ginsberg, Joan, and others sprawled on the bed, high on Benzedrine and alcohol. Kerouac records Adams as saying, "This is what I fought for?" and Joan responds, "Why don't you get down from your character heights?" (Kerouac 123). This one scene marks a moment in Joan's life where she would turn her back on any semblance of a "normal life" and become Beat.

Vollmer was also known for her independent and always critical mind. In her copy of Marx's *Capital and Other Writings*, Joan scribbled in the margins, "Maybe Marxism is dynamic and optimistic, and Freudianism is not. Is one more serviceable than the other? Why does it have to be either/or?" (T. Morgan 93). Jack Kerouac, in his collected journals *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac 1947-1954*, would list her in his fictional School of Comedians where she would teach a course on "The Atomic Disease and its Manifestations," another on "The Meaning of the Veil," and in the proverbial spring she would teach a course called "Hints." Even though this school was supposed to be a joke, Kerouac writes, "That's the school, there's the faculty,

thus the courses. Could one learn there? Don't you think one could really learn there? Learn something you never learn in school?" (Kerouac, *Windblown* 227).

What is interesting about Jack Kerouac's fictional school is that all of the instructors in the school are male—Burroughs, Huncke, Cassady, Ginsberg, Carr, and himself—except Joan.

Allen Ginsberg grew very close to Joan, and even though she was only three years older than he was, he still looked up to her like a mother figure. Ginsberg in his journal noted Joan's intelligence: "Joan Adams has high consciousness—she chooses to live forsaking ambition and pride" (*Early Journals* 121). Ginsberg had never met such a sassy and outspoken woman as Joan Vollmer. During these times, women were expected to be at their man's beck and call, but Joan seemed fluent in all the conversation topics of the group and was not afraid to voice her opinion around this seeming "boy's club" of intellectuals and artists. Ginsberg remembered that Joan Vollmer was the first person he heard openly criticize the President of the United States. Joan's intellect and radical life choices is what the Beats found appealing about Joan Vollmer, but her life was not without its tragedies.

Joan's life took a drastic turn when she became involved with William S. Burroughs. Her addiction to Benzedrine led to her commitment to Bellevue. Her life as mother to two children by different fathers and her downward slope of drug addiction and alcoholism coupled with her catching polio led to her eventual death at the hands of Burroughs. Joan Vollmer's life is shrouded in infamy, so the question remains; what legacy did she leave? The end of Joan

Vollmer's life seemed to be a tragedy. A bright, young, creative woman lay dead at the hand of her husband. Burroughs would go on to use her death as a catalyst for his writing, but is that the sum of her legacy? Joan Vollmer's influence goes deeper than a reason for someone to write. Joan Vollmer was instrumental in guiding and housing the creative incubator that would eventually birth the Beat Generation and yet Joan Vollmer exists on the fringes of Beat studies. She is remembered in clips and phrases, here and there in the Beats' work, yet she persists as an area of interest for those who study the Beats. Ultimately, what is not known about Joan Vollmer is what makes her unforgettable. Joan Vollmer's legacy is that she resists reification and through that, her life becomes ephemeral, which, in turn, reminds each one of us that life is ephemeral.

Joan And Edie Are The First Women Of The Beat Generation

The two women who were in the center of this social and literary revolution knew quite well what they were involved in and they had no delusions of their role. Ann Charters in her book, *Beat Down to Your Soul*, writes that these Beat women knew exactly what their position was in the Beat Generation:

When Joan Burroughs, Joyce Johnson, Eileen Kaufman, and I made the decision to live independently, we took jobs and paid the rent on our own apartments, but we also found it natural to offer support to writers such as William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac,

Bob Kaufman, and fledgling writers like Samuel Charters. It was in our nature to nurture. We knew that by providing a place for our lovers to stay, we often enabled them to create their poetry and fiction. We wouldn't accept the alternative—living at home and losing our independence. (612-13)

Edie Parker and Joan Vollmer defied the concept of what it meant to be feminine. Edie Parker called Joan Vollmer, "the most feminine girl I ever knew. She wore makeup, eyeshadow, powder and lipstick" (Kerouac-Parker 4). At the same time, Joan Vollmer exercised her intellect every chance she could; "Her idea of a good time was to sip Kummel liqueur at Child's on Broadway and have intellectual conversations and soft, sad music" (4-5). Edie Parker worked long hours driving a forklift at the docks and then would work as a cigarette girl at a local Times Square club. Even though Edie Parker hailed from a prominent Grosse Pointe family, she was not afraid to take more masculine roles when it was necessary and then flaunt her feminine physique to peddle cigarettes and earn better tips. These women certainly did not "accept the alternative" by staying at home and losing their independence. They lived their lives on their own terms, a life which during the postwar era was difficult to achieve.

Joan Vollmer, considered by Brenda Knight to be "seminal in the creation of the Beat Generation" (49), was no poster child for the American housewife. At the same time, she was not an all-out feminist crusader who would stop at nothing to gain women's rights. Joan Vollmer left home at sixteen years old and quickly married by the time she was seventeen. Women during this period in

American history found that through marriage they would free themselves from their parents and gain a sense of independence. This may seem an extreme action on retrospect of 60 years, but it was actually a logical step for a woman of Joan Vollmer's individuality. Joan Vollmer fell in love with New York City, but rejected the staunch, male-oriented curriculum that academia was offering during this time. She probably found the required courses boring or unchallenging because of her incredible intellect and rebellious nature.

However, the city nightlife and the men the city had to offer intrigued her more than anything else, so it is not difficult to see how a young, brilliant, impressionable girl would fall in love with a Columbia law student who loved to read. The elopement of Joan Vollmer and Paul Adams was freedom for Joan in the sense that now she was the head of her own household. The fact that Paul Adams was a soldier and shipped off to war, leaving her alone, only fueled her self-reliance and allowed her to find out who she really was. Joan Vollmer entered a marriage that granted her both freedom and respect because married women carried a certain weight that single women could never achieve.

Women wanted marriage because, according to Ann Charters,

Our sexual freedom came at a high price in the 1950s, when most men respected a woman only if she was somebody's wife. We knew the score. Although we were in rebellion against what we considered our second-class status in American society, we still respected marriage. Ironically, at the time we thought it was the final proof of our independence. A wedding ring was a visible

sign to an uncaring world that we weren't immature or irresponsible or unstable, that we had accomplished something of value on our own. (*Beat Down* 613).

Joan Vollmer used her status as Mrs. Paul Adams to help her get leases on apartments and jobs to help support herself. When Joan Vollmer Adams and Edie Parker were looking for an apartment of their own, Edie used Mrs. Joan Adams' name "as a respectable married lady" (Peabody 115) to apply for the lease at 119th Street. The label of married woman carried a lot of weight for Joan Adams and many other women in this male-dominated society. Even though Joan Adams's first marriage would fall apart and end in divorce, it helped her live an independent life where she could be free to date as many men as she wanted while reading whatever literature she wanted.

With Joan Adams's status as "respectable married woman," Edie Parker was able to move out of her grandparents' apartment and live independently with Joan Vollmer. Since both of them liked to date extraordinary men, their apartment was primed to be a creative incubator for the Beat Generation. Although these women did not write alongside the men, they contributed by being the men's support structure and in the case of Joan Vollmer, contributing ideas that would end up in the pages of Beat novels and poems. Edie Parker worked many masculine jobs to support Jack Kerouac as he wrote, but eventually she did produce a memoir about her experience during this whole time. However, what these early Beat women did for the other Beat women writers to come along in the late 1950s and 1960s was break down the barriers

for these women to be able to live their lives as writers. These women served as pioneers for women to live their lives as artists, independent and fearless.

The Apartment As Beat Space

Joan Vollmer spent much of her time during the New York years taking in these wayward boarders to fill her large apartment. Each of these boarders, from Jack Kerouac to Allen Ginsberg to Hal Chase and William S. Burroughs, were detached from the “state” and all flocked together in a common place. All of these Beat characters were deeply affected by the war and all that had come from it, such as the atomic bomb and the Nazi concentration camps. To these young artists, “The world was a very confusing place: all the old values appeared to have been swept away by the war but no new ones had yet been proposed to replace them” (Miles, *Kerouac* 91). The Beats were lost in a world of uncertainty but they found comfort in each other and in the apartment where they were free from the trappings of society and could explore newfound ideas.

What these early Beats were looking for was a change from the military industrial complex, man in the gray flannel suit America they saw happening all around them. The Atom bomb showed them that the world was heading toward self-annihilation and the only way to change this destructive path was to embrace a form of spirituality. This spirituality would be a strong element in the Beat Generation writings and philosophy. What the Beats were looking for was a space for this spirituality to be nurtured and shared by others. The space that the Beats were creating in Joan Vollmer’s apartment is best described as a

“Beat Tzimtzum.” According to Jewish mysticism, the “Tzimtzum” is “the Kabbalistic theory of creation that God ‘contracted’ his infinite light in order to allow for a ‘conceptual space’ in which a finite, seemingly independent world could exist. This contraction is known as the Tzimtzum” (Robinson 382). The Beats, especially Kerouac and Ginsberg, viewed the Beat philosophy as a spiritual journey. Kerouac would call this search, a search to “see God’s face” (Nicosia 157). Kerouac and Ginsberg did not search for “God’s face” in churches, but in the seedy parts of town, like Times Square:

There is no understanding these incipient “Beats,” at this point in their lives [the 1940s], without referring to their overwhelming sense of the holiness of the streets—which is to say, the holiness of every spot of ground trod by man. Holy is the only way to describe their feeling that Times Square was a single giant room. Studying the intricate copper and stonework on the cornices and tops of the buildings, Jack [Kerouac] and Allen [Ginsberg] had been drawn to look at the open sky above. From both of them, the sight of the city (and earth) “hanging in space” triggered a sudden mystic awareness of time’s passage within eternity, of the perishable world within a permanent void. (Nicosia 157)

The holiness that Kerouac and Ginsberg were experiencing seems to be recognition of the Kabbalistic idea of the Tzimtzum. Kerouac and Ginsberg believed that there was an imprint of God in the lowliest corners of Times Square and the world. The conceptual space where they were able to create and

nurture their "New Vision" was the apartment where they were able to gather together and share their different ideas. Within this community, there is a world of ideas both spiritual and secular being discussed. The formation of the "New Vision" is a direct result of this Tzimtzum that was created in Joan Vollmer's apartment for this group from 1945-1946.

With the collective minds of William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Joan Vollmer, the apartment served them well to explore their artistic potentials. During this time, a bond formed that would last a lifetime between those involved in the community. This time became a great period of freedom beyond anything that they ever dreamed and they filled their time "with endless verbalizing and 'Dostoevskian' confrontations. They were together constantly. It was like a marathon encounter session. As Hal Chase put it, 'you could dip into the set at any point and stay with it for days on end'" (T. Morgan 116).

All of the members of this community added their own opinions on art, philosophy, politics, and their own concepts of the world. Kerouac felt he was on a mission to bring a bit of heaven down to earth, "Jack defined his mission as 'self ultimacy,' which included the creation of a new 'artistic morality.' This new morality justified his search for fresh experience, as long as those experiences didn't directly harm other people" (Nicosia 134). Burroughs was involved in this group because he was always the outsider, the liminal figure since he was a child who wanted more than anything to experience as much as was possible in the world. Since Burroughs was ten years older than the other

members of the group were, he happily took the position as mentor and exposed the Beats to ideas they would never have come across through Columbia University. Burroughs introduced them to an anarchistic view of the world that would by today's standards be called libertarianism, but Burroughs called it conservatism. William Burroughs was the first to introduce Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* to the Beats:

It was from Spengler that Jack received what would now be called an eco-consciousness: the idea that the earth was being plundered, that natural resources were being squandered. It gave him a sympathetic understanding of Third World cultures, of the people left out of the so-called civilisation. It was on his first visit to Mexico, when he saw the peasants tilling the earth, that he first understood what Spengler was saying. (Miles, *Kerouac* 70)

Burroughs borrowed from Spengler how the state was responsible for the horrible conditions of the workers. Through government intervention into business, that was where the corruption would occur. Burroughs was Harvard educated and worldly traveled, having spent several years in Europe before the war started. He was interested in a new world as much as he was interested in the seediness of New York City. According to Barry Miles' biography of Jack Kerouac, "In his quest to experience the depths, Bill [Burroughs] began a systematic investigation of the local lowlife, exploring all the bars between 60th and Times Square" (79). Ann Douglas, in her essay, "The City Where the Beats Were Moved to Howl," writes that "Burroughs was a refugee from the 'life-

proof houses' of suburban St. Louis. In his novel *Queer*, he explained that he was drawn to New York, as to Mexico City, because it was a 'terminal of space-time travel'" (6). Burroughs recognized that it was in this liminal phase of his life that he could explore all aspects of mankind. He was heavily into psychoanalysis, having been psychoanalyzed, and would spend much time trying to psychoanalyze Kerouac and Ginsberg: "Burroughs's lay analysis continued until June 1946. Allen and Jack each spent an hour at a time free-associating. Bill sat in a straight-backed chair like a proper Freudian analyst, while they lay on the couch" (Miles, *Ginsberg* 70). Free association would come to influence their poetry since it was one of the principles behind Beat writing.

Allen Ginsberg found a new sense of connection in this community. He took on Burroughs as a mentor and teacher, replacing Mark Van Doren and Lionel Trilling, his Columbia professors. Allen Ginsberg entered the community with his beliefs shattered, and "Allen's swift and unexpected suspension from Columbia cast him into limbo, with no plans and no idea when he would be permitted to resume his studies" (Miles, *Ginsberg* 61). But with Kerouac, Chase, Burroughs, Vollmer, and Parker, he had a new sense of purpose in his life: to explore and expand consciousness. He spent much of his time deep in conversation with Kerouac, Vollmer, and Burroughs trying to find out literature and humanity. Ginsberg was only eighteen years old, but "he was a member of an adult group and a number of close friends who gave him a level of emotional security he had not previously enjoyed" (61). Even though he was the youngest member of the group, Ginsberg did plenty to add to the "New Vision" concept.

Both Kerouac and Ginsberg shared the dark, decaying vision of the world as described by Spengler, “But Allen added something new to Jack’s vision of decay, a happy foil to Jack’s sense of hopelessness: the concept of the ‘angel,’ a being who is elevated spiritually as he is degraded in body. The revelation of the junkies and prostitutes of Times Square as a host of angels profoundly affected Jack’s writing for the rest of his life” (Nicosia 144). It would be Allen Ginsberg that would add that element of spirituality into the Beat consciousness and transform this community to that of a Tzimtzum.

As much as they tried to make this space spiritual, Joan Vollmer’s apartment was filled constant partying and all-night conversations with little regard for those who went to work or school. This entire scene may have seemed like chaos, but there was method in the madness of this community. The time at Joan Vollmer’s apartment was spent building something more than friendship:

They were an extended family, a pre-sixties commune, with Joan and Edie as den mothers. It seemed to Hal Chase that in all the books he later wrote, Kerouac had tried to duplicate the marathon discussions they had...Hal’s only complaint was that with all the talking and carousing, he didn’t have time for normal activities. These people didn’t want to learn, they wanted to emote, to soak up the world. (T. Morgan 96).

Throughout their criticism of postwar society, they learned how they might work to change the world. In this community, Joan Vollmer may have felt the

liberation that her marriage and the outside world failed to offer. She certainly contributed much of her intellect to this community and fought the hardest to maintain it, but the difference between Joan Vollmer and Jack Kerouac was gender. Even though Jack Kerouac was expelled from Columbia University, he was still able to travel the countryside alone without resistance from the society he lived in. Kerouac and even Ginsberg had more freedoms simply because they were men. Joan Vollmer, during this time, still had to use the name, Mrs. Paul Adams to be able to get a lease for an apartment and her college experience was not very conducive to the bohemian lifestyle, which Joan truly wanted to live (See Miles' *Kerouac*). The risks that she took and the ideas that she presented were not considered feminine and during this time it was extremely important for American women to be feminine. Joan Vollmer had to exist in two worlds, the community that was her Beat Tzintzum, and the real world where she had to work to support the lifestyle of the Beat men. Joan Vollmer straddled both worlds as a liminal figure in society, knowing that she could not become a Beat writer the same way that Jack Kerouac could or William S. Burroughs; she had to find another way to contribute to this Beat world.

This breaking down of barriers above everything was a great accomplishment for future Beat women to succeed as artists where Joan could not have. It is no surprise that the Beat Movement has many prominent women who are responsible for its continuation, from Anne Waldman, Hettie Jones, and Diana di Prima to Hedwig Gorski, Karen Minzer, and Bobbie Louise Hawkins. Women have always been an important to both the Beat Generation and the

Beat Movement. Although during the early years there was not much attention paid to these women, recently over the past ten years there has been a rising amount of publications and research done on Beat women. For many cases, the women of the Beat Generation served as the glue of the movement, from supplying a space for their community to publishing and organizing.

Since the Beat Generation was not widely accepted in the mainstream publishing world, they had to create publishing avenues for themselves. This was done in a variety of ways such as the creation of small presses and little magazines. Because of breakthroughs in technology available at the time, publishing became less expensive. It was for years that many of the books that contained “literature” were hardback, too expensive for many to own, but with the popularity of pulp fiction in the 1930s and 40s came the more inexpensive paperback books. These less expensive books could sell for 75 cents and usually could fit into a pocket. At the same time, small printing presses called mimeograph machines were gaining popularity and many of the Beat magazines were turning to printing themselves. This turn of events in publishing history led to the success of underground papers and presses.

Part II: The Mimeograph Revolution: The Community Of Small Presses And Magazines

1957 ushered in the first Beat Generation book to be published by a mainstream press, Kerouac’s *On The Road*, which was certainly was not the first successful Beat book to be published. The first was Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and*

Other Poems, which was published by the small press, City Lights Books. The success of the small press in the late 1950s was a rather new turning point for the publishing world. For many years, the publishing world was dominated by major presses out of New York such as Viking and Simon & Schuster, but with the success of *Howl* and City Lights Books, the small press market became the place to be published if you were an author writing non-academic, experimental work. The beginning of the 1960s also saw the rise of mimeograph literary magazine and the self-made chapbook. These magazines and chapbooks were seen as amateur publications, but gained much notoriety throughout the sixties and became the young avant-garde writer's résumé in many ways. What kept these magazines, chapbooks, and small press books circulating and selling was the community that came along with these publications.

In order for poets and writers to sell their work and circumvent the traditional publishing venues, they had to self-promote their work and in order to self-promote, they needed to be seen and heard. In the 1960s the best way to be seen and heard was to read at a poetry reading and be part of a poetry community. These poetry communities were the media and distribution centers for the Beat Generation and laid the foundation for the Beat Movements' continued success through small presses, magazines, blogs, chapbooks, and CDs. In order for these magazines and small presses to be successful, they needed to market themselves as part of an artistic community. These magazines and presses relied heavily on the name of the Beat Generation to sell their works. As William Carlos Williams once said, "A little magazine's only

rationale is its editor's belief that the writers he prints must be presented as a group. Anything else is just a collation of pages" (Kane 57). In the 1960s there were two places that served as the media and distribution hubs for the Beat communities, the Lower East Side of New York City and the North Beach of San Francisco. The Lower East Side saw the rise of Grove Press, *Yugen*, *Floating Bear*, *Fuck You/a magazine of the arts*, and *The Evergreen Review*. North Beach in San Francisco saw the rise of Bob Kaufman's poetry readings, *Beatitude magazine*, City Lights Books, Black Sparrow Books, and the Co-Existence Bagel Shop.

Typesetting The Beat Word: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene

As Greenwich Village became commercialized and popularized as the beatnik center of the world, many of the serious Beat poets moved to the Lower East Side of New York City. With the success of the Beat Generation becoming famous throughout mainstream culture, the Village became exposed as THE place to go to become Beat, but only if you could afford it. As Daniel Kane writes in *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*:

The Lower East Side was well-known for its history of Latino, Ukrainian, Jewish, and other minority poor-to-working-class long-term residents, generations of whom had spent the better part of the century establishing a community in the face of repeated attempts by the real estate industry to transform the Lower East Side into a middle-class professional haven. Thus, the newly arrived artists on the Lower East Side were defined both by their rejection of the West Village as overpriced, bourgeois, and co-

opted by the Lower East Side's tradition of working-class radicalism and resistance. (3)

This seemed to be the last refuge for Beats to live and write in New York City. The 1960s saw more than just social revolution; the decade also saw a rise in the cost of living in the places the Beat writers used to write about and live in. As the social climate began to change, the Beats and other socially conscious writers could no longer be a part of the commercialized Village scene, so they moved south to a more working class neighborhood. Allen Ginsberg would call the Lower East Side his home until his death in 1997. Because of the strong community of immigrants in this area, they were able to keep their apartments rent-controlled, and they were still able to write for and about the poor-and-working classes, but remain close to the literary scene of the Village and downtown Manhattan. It was certainly a unique place that would later spawn the Nuyorican Poetry Scene as well as St. Mark's Poetry Project, but the one thing that no one saw coming was the role that the Lower East Side would play as the East Coast media distribution center of Beat literature.

One of the most successful avenues of getting Beat writings published was through the publication of mimeograph and "little" magazines. The mimeograph machine is a portable printing press created by Thomas Edison in 1887. The mimeograph was often used for quick and cheap advertisement pamphlets, entertainment posters, and self-published political manifestos. They were also commonly used in classrooms in public schools. It did not really gain popularity until the 1960s when many poets were starting to publish their own

magazines. "The mimeograph in particular," Daniel Kane writes, "allowed for speedy, cheap reproduction. That speediness lent mimeographed materials an urgency allusive of newspaper 'extras.' Mimeos contained breaking news of the poetry world, serving as carriers of fresh and vital information" (57). In the 1960s the mimeograph magazines served as the Facebook of the underground poetry scene, it connected everyone in the poetry and solidified a poetic community that circumvented the academic and New York publishing house world. Many of these magazines did not just include poems and artwork, but also announcements for poetry readings and publications of small press books. These magazines would keep people informed of events that were not included in the Village Voice or the New York Times. These magazines sometimes referred to, as "little magazines," were crucial for those interested in the underground poetry scenes to know what was happening. Felix Pollak in "An Interview on Little Magazines," writes, "Little magazines share certain characteristics: they are primarily literary, often experimental, and typically unfettered. Virtually all have a small circulation, and they are usually published, edited, and financed by one person or by a small group of persons who are amateurs—that is to say, people without a profit motive" (Olson 35). This was a common theme amongst these little magazines; it was more about getting the word out than making money off of their publications. Many of these publications only saw a few issues, but their success in creating a new form of publication has had a lasting effect. The Lower East Side saw many

short-lived mimeograph magazines, but the ones that left an indelible mark were *Yugen*, *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts*, and *The Evergreen Review*.

Yugen was the brainchild of LeRoi and Hettie Jones, which was the first of the mimeograph magazines that had a successful printing run. *Yugen* would only run for four issues but would be remembered as the magazine that ushered in the mimeograph revolution. In her memoir Hettie Jones writes, “*Yugen* 1 was neat, twenty-four pages, serious looking, its cover print an ochre on off-white grainy paper, the white spaces making the face of a man you don’t see at first because he’s in reverse” (54). There were only two people who handled the magazine’s construction, the Joneses, and they put it together for less than fifty dollars. “I walked them all over the Village getting them in bookstores,” Leroi Jones writes, “I think we did five hundred and in a short time they were gone. There was no money in it, of course, but we wanted to get the work out” (Baraka 221). This was the beginning of a new kind of media distribution that the Joneses utilized out of necessity because the major magazines and presses would not touch their work, so they had to promote themselves, and the mimeograph allowed them to do this with very little money.

For LeRoi Jones it was more important to change the dynamic of the poetry world and introduce new poetics. As LeRoi Jones proclaims, “I didn’t have any analytical treatise prepared on why my own consciousness was new, but that’s the way I felt. And there were the vibes I picked up from the young people around me who were trying to live in a contemporary world. The people who had not been mugged so severely by various ‘English Departments’ that

they were still battily swamped in iambic pentameter, not to mention starchy-ass ways of living” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 221). *Yugen* allowed for this “new consciousness” to take shape and at the same time worked to solidify a community of writers and poets that before had to rely on major press publications to be read. Out of *Yugen* came *Floating Bear*, which was created by Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones. According to Hettie Jones, “Roi and Diane—mostly Diane, who owned the mimeograph—were mailing a sheet called *The Floating Bear*, its purpose to publish new work faster than the quarterly *Yugen*. Its frequent appearances were ideal for messages” (Jones 140). *The Floating Bear* exemplified the need for quicker publications, which included as many announcements of poetry readings as actual printed poems. It was an outsider’s magazine and the printing runs for *Floating Bear* ranged only around 500. The magazine became so popular at one point that as Reva Wolf points out in *Andy Warhol, Poetry and Gossip in the 1960s*, “the only way to receive a copy was by knowing a person who worked on its production and thereby could add names to the mailing list” (38). This type of distribution became typical for these mimeograph magazines, since many of the editors of these magazines did not have much money to begin with, but it also kept the magazines in high demand.

The mimeograph-publishing scene and the poetry reading scene were inseparable and one aspect fed the other. The relationship was reciprocal and it affected the way poetry was written and performed. According to Daniel Kane, “This style of publication helped define poetry as living in the mouths of contemporary people as opposed to distant authors; poetry was presented in

such a way that the reader could easily imagine the poem as an utterance" (59). This relationship would be one that would work to define Beat poetry for the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement. Since many of the editors of these magazines were also the poets in the readings, "it was not unusual to find editors interested in enacting—within the confines of the mimeographed page—the level of sociability inherent in the real world of the poetry community" (Kane 59). The mimeograph also allowed these poets and writers to indulge their socialistic idealism by allowing them to distribute these magazines for a low price or for free as is the case for Ed Sanders and his *Fuck You* magazine.

Perhaps one of the most controversial magazines of its era was Sanders' *Fuck You/ a magazine of the arts*. In 1962, young budding poet Ed Sanders saw Allen Ginsberg perform in Jonas Mekas' experimental film *Guns of the Trees*. In his memoir *Fug You: An Informal History of the Peace Eye Bookstore, the Fuck You Press, the Fugs, and Counterculture in the Lower East Side*, Sanders writes, "The day after watching Ginsberg chant poetry in *Guns of the Trees*, I typed the first issue of *Fuck You/ A Magazine of the Arts* on a *Catholic Worker* typewriter, on the third floor, on mimeograph stencils that I borrowed" (7). At the time that Sanders was putting together this new magazine he was employed by the *Catholic Worker*, a left-leaning newspaper started by Dorothy Day. Sanders respected the *Catholic Worker* for what it was doing for the working poor, but it was not a literary magazine and in 1962, the feeling was that the literature of the streets was going to change the world. For Sanders, poetry was the vehicle that was going to lead America into a new enlightened world and so, after watching

Ginsberg, *Fuck You* was born. "The first issue," Sanders writes, "was a beautiful light green; subsequent issues were various shades of red. Some pages were flecky gray, and a few were blue or near-chrome yellow" (7). The design of these magazines became just as important as the content inside, due to the involvement of artists in the Beat Movement. The look of the magazine was only one of its distinctive qualities. Perhaps the most memorable aspect of this magazine was its byline: PUBLISHED & PRINTED BY ED SANDERS AT A SECRET LOCATION IN THE LOWER EAST SIDE.

The magazine saw "much heat from the fuzz" as Ed Sanders would say, not only because of its title but also because of its publication of questionable material. Ed Sanders was often harassed by the police, not only for his publication of *Fuck You*, but because of political agitation in the 1960s and so distribution had to take on a more covert approach. Because of its title and its content, "Ed Sanders's magazine *Fuck You*/ *a magazine of the arts* was only available in a select number of stores, hidden behind counters. Knowledge of where to find the magazine was analogous to knowledge of a secret code or handshake necessary for entry into an exclusive if irreverent club" (Kane 64). This covert distribution method coupled with its byline published "at a secret location on the Lower East Side" and his pledge to publish anything that pushed the envelope made *Fuck You* a magazine that changed the dynamic of mimeograph magazines. Within its pages, poets like Charles Olson, LeRoi Jones, Bonnie Bremser, and even W.H. Auden appeared, and through its four year run it probably got more attention than any other little magazine at the

time. Much of this had to do with its run-ins with the law and its obscenity trial, which, on one hand, catapulted the magazine into mainstream consciousness but on the other, crushed Ed Sanders financially so that he could no longer afford to produce the magazine. Sanders was eventually acquitted of all charges and a press release put out by Sanders himself read, "Ed Sanders Wins Obscenity Case...New York judges Ringel, Sherwin, & Hoffman ruled that *Fuck You*/ a magazine of the arts is not obscene and does not violate the New York State obscenity code (section 1141) and is protected by constitutional guarantee of freedom" (Kane 78). The magazine has since been regarded as the magazine that changed the rules for publishing literature in a magazine and once again created a space for Beat writers to flourish and connect. The magazine had a heavy Beat influence with pieces by William S. Burroughs, Tuli Kupferberg, Ray Bremser, and Allen Ginsberg constantly gracing the pages. Along with *Fuck You*, perhaps the most influential magazine was also a part of Grove Press, and that was the *Evergreen Review*.

Grove Press, started by Barney Rossett, is the biggest press to publish Beat writers, second only to City Lights Books. Grove Press gained its success in the 1960s by making the bold move to publish many Beat writers. This move by Grove Press was not out of character because it had already gained a reputation for publishing D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* series. Both of these books had gone through their own obscenity trials and so Grove Press was no stranger to controversy. In 1951, Barney Rossett bought Grove Press and used it as his vehicle to publish alternative works,

which he did quite frequently. Grove Press had been through many lengthy court trials, but it was not until the publication of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* that the press was tested at a state Supreme Court level. *Naked Lunch* brought about Grove Press' most successful victory in court, finally turning the tide of obscenity trials in America.

The production of the *Evergreen Review* helped foster and nurture the Beat community in a way that the other mimeograph magazines could not. It had a wider readership that was able to reach the West Coast and played a part in the San Francisco Renaissance. With its wider readership came more resistance from the establishment and "Grove Press and its associated magazine the *Evergreen Review* unavoidably represented a dangerous collection of writers. The *Evergreen Review*, for example, published politically radical writers including Artaud, Jean Genet, Baraka, and O'Hara" (Kane 13). Although it published many "dangerous writers" it still played to the mainstream and would not publish really radical work until 1960 with the publication of William S. Burroughs piece, "Deposition: Testimony concerning a Sickness." For a while, *Evergreen* tried to be the magazine that bridged the gap between mainstream and radical literature. It constantly teetered between the two by publishing European intellectuals alongside American radicals.

In his essay, "'Within A Budding Grove': Pubescent Postmodernism and the Early *Evergreen Review*," Nicholas Zurbrugg writes, "*Evergreen Review's* early publishing policy was of cautious mainstream experimentation, carefully balancing the acceptable and the unacceptable, the readable and the unreadable,

the commercial and the uncommercial" (158). This balance that *Evergreen* tried to maintain was one of the reasons it received the funding it did to be able to have mass distribution and also be able to work as advertising for Grove Press. The magazine operated under this initiative for three years before the tide of social change made *Evergreen* rethink its role as the bridge between the mainstream and the underground. As the mimeograph revolution began to have a real effect on the literary world, *Evergreen Review* realized that its role would have to slant more toward to being the magazine that brought the underground to the mainstream instead of being a bridge. As the obscenity trials increased in the 1960s and the work of the poets and writers became more political and experimental, *Evergreen* recognized that the wind was changing more toward the radical and so they followed suit. Bruce King writes in "*Evergreen Review*, 'Grove Press, and Jazz'," that "A strength and weakness of *Evergreen Review* was its close relationship to rapidly changing taste of the period. And changes were in the air" (169). The *Evergreen Review* was in the 1960s the magazine to be published in for avant-garde writers. It quickly became known as one of the only mainstream magazines where Beat writings could be published. This magazine served a function that no other magazine did at the time and that was to connect the San Francisco Renaissance with the Lower East Side poetry scene. Because of *Evergreen's* larger distribution the Beat writers became a national movement.

Writings On The Beat Streets: A Community Of North Beach Words In Print

San Francisco has always been the West Coast center of Beat and avant-garde writings and it was in San Francisco where Ginsberg first read "Howl" at the Six Gallery, giving voice to a new generation of poetry. This city and its poetry revolution even garnered the name "The San Francisco Renaissance," which became synonymous with the Beat Generation and North Beach in particular. Lawrence Ferlinghetti in the introduction to *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: A Literary Tour* writes, "Renaissance had blossomed in the late 1940s, perhaps centered more in Berkeley than in the City. The literary and political ferment in the City itself was rife with anarchist circles and leftist poetry magazines, much of it gravitating toward the old bohemian district. Thus it was that North Beach became the place where new literary associations began, where what became known as the Beat Generation came together" (B. Morgan xiv). North Beach would become the stomping grounds of Bob Kaufman and it would be here that the poetry reading would gain its momentum. The poetry reading and subsequent publications of little magazines and small presses became as integral a part in the Beat movement in San Francisco as it was in New York. But while New York was still ten years from cultural radical revolution, San Francisco was already the home of several radical thinkers and writers like Kenneth Rexroth, John Steinbeck, and Robert Duncan.

San Francisco had such an impact that the second issue of the *Evergreen Review* was called "San Francisco Scene" featuring only San Francisco based

writers. In the introduction to the issue, prominent San Francisco poet Kenneth Rexroth writes, “No literature of the past two hundred years is of the slightest importance unless it is ‘disaffiliated’ (Rexroth 6), and the San Francisco Renaissance writers were certainly that “disaffiliated” with the establishment they saw as destructive, controlling, and predatory. Rexroth writes that San Francisco draws the best disenfranchised writers because

Poets come to San Francisco for the same reason so many Hungarians have been going to Austria recently. They write the sort of thing they do for the same reason that Holderlin or Blake or Baudelaire or Rimbaud or Mallarme wrote it. The world of poet-professors, Southern Colonels and ex-Left Social Fascists from which they have escaped has no more to do with literature than do the leading authors of the court of Napoleon III whose names can be found in the endless pages of the *Causeries du lundi*. The *Vaticide Review* is simply the *Saturday Evening Post* of the excessively miseducated, and its kept poets are the Zane Greys, Clarence Budington Kellands and J.P. Marquands of Brooks Brothers Boys who got an overdose of T. S. Eliot at some Ivy League fog factory. It is just that simple. (8)

San Francisco, in some ways more than the Lower East Side, exhibited an anti-establishment sentiment that attracted the most radical thinkers. The atmosphere in this West Coast city seemed to have a more inviting and comfortable feeling than most other cities in America during the 1950s and 60s,

and so the question arises: could “Howl” have had such an impact if it was first read in New York?

The Lower East of New York City had more mimeographed magazines that gained greater notoriety, but San Francisco is the home of City Lights Books, the main publisher of Beat works in the world, the Six Gallery, and the famous North Beach where many of the Beat writers came to read. San Francisco had a very special mix of people, environment, and ideas that made it the only place where the Beat Generation could ever have really gained its legs. Gary Snyder once said, “In the spiritual and political loneliness of America of the fifties you’d hitch a thousand miles to meet a friend. Whatever lives needs a habitat, a proper culture of warmth and moisture to grow. West coast of those days, San Francisco was the only city; and of San Francisco, North Beach” (Davidson 23). San Francisco remains the home of many Beat poets and many Beat publications. Of the many publications in San Francisco the highest concentration of Beat readings and publications came from City Lights Books and *Beatitude Magazine*. Each of these gave voice to the Beat Generation and in the case of City Lights and *Beatitude*, still do.

City Lights Books, the creation of Lawrence Ferlinghetti is named for the Charlie Chaplin film *City Lights*. The mission of City Lights Books was to be the first and only publisher to publish paperback-only books that were affordable and to bring literature back to the streets. Michael Davidson in his book, *San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*, writes that if someone were to a comprehensive history of the San Francisco Renaissance “It

would have to include the opening of Lawrence Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore in 1953 and the subsequent publication of City Lights Books" (2). This little bookstore started with Lawrence Ferlinghetti and a partner Peter David Martin, who was a San Francisco State professor of sociology. They each pitched in \$500 and developed a concept that seemed like really bad business sense in 1953. One of the major bad business decisions they made was choosing to sell only paperback books and to forego promoting best-selling books for "serious literature, especially poetry" (O'Toole 36). Because of Ferlinghetti's seemingly nonsensical business strategy, Peter David Martin sold his share of the bookstore to Ferlinghetti and got out of the crazy venture.

However, Ferlinghetti's crazy strategy worked and his bookstore was an instant success. The next step for Ferlinghetti was to get into the publishing business, since he already had a bookstore to sell the books he would publish. The first book he published was his own, *Pictures of the Gone World*, in a series that Ferlinghetti called "The City Lights Pocket Poets" series, which sold for 75 cents a copy and fit right into your back pocket. The next two books would be by Kenneth Rexroth and Kenneth Patchen respectively, but it would be book number 4 in the series that would skyrocket the series, the press, and the bookstore into the public eye. After Ferlinghetti attended the Six Gallery Reading in 1955, he approached a young Allen Ginsberg and asked him for his manuscript for the poem that he had just read, "Howl." This book would cause the biggest stir in small press history since the publications of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer* from Grove Press. *Howl and Other Poems* became the

first poetry book to face obscenity charges and because of its notoriety, it sold out almost instantly. After this point, many people wanted to be published through City Lights Books. Ferlinghetti, however, would not publish just anything; he wanted to stick to publishing non-traditional works. In the introduction to the *City Lights Pocket Poets Anthology*, Ferlinghetti writes, "From the beginning the aim was to publish across the board, avoiding the provincial and the academic, and not publishing (that pitfall of the little press) just 'our gang.' I had in mind rather an international, dissident, insurgent ferment" (i). For sixty years, this press continues to push the envelope, publishing international as well as domestic writers that challenge the status quo of society.

What initially fostered City Lights Books' energy was in large part its location: North Beach. In her essay, "City Lights in Modern Times," Patricia O'Toole writes, "Thanks largely to the literary ferment at City Lights, the surrounding North Beach area was becoming the hub of San Francisco's intellectual life. In places like The Scene and The Coexistence Bagel Shop, poets/activists worried, wrote, and argued" (37). North Beach quickly became the Beat center of San Francisco and with City Lights offering it a means for distributing their works; it became the place on the West Coast to be Beat. It would be here in the North Beach area that Bob Kaufman would get the idea to start a magazine to help promote the writers that Ferlinghetti was publishing in books. Kaufman wanted to foster the poetry scene in North Beach and he thought a magazine was what they needed most and so *Beatitude* was born.

Beatitude magazine was the creation of Bob Kaufman, Allen Ginsberg, and John Kelly and started out like many of the magazines of the era as a mimeograph magazine in 1959. Kaufman wanted the magazine to connect the writers of the area and expose them to the world; it was a way to make community. The mission statement to the magazine reads, "A weekly miscellany of poetry and other jazz designed to extol beauty and promote the beatific or poetic life among the various mendicants, neo-existentialists, Buddhas, poets, painters, musicians, and other inhabitants and observers of North Beach, San Francisco, California, United States of North America." This magazine, which after the sixteenth issue was picked up by City Lights and distributed by them with Kaufman and Kelly remaining the editors until their deaths. The magazine was one of many in North Beach but because of Kaufman's relentless production, the magazine has never stopped running, even turning to web publications today.

This magazine became the voice of the spiritual side of the Beat movement and because of Kaufman it was fiercely political against racism. Kaufman would often publish his own political poems like "Jail Poem" and the "Abomunist Manifesto" alongside Richard Brautigan to capture a range of the new poetics of the Beat movement. Kaufman would tirelessly assemble these magazines late into the night and then be seen the next day passing them out to people on the streets of North Beach. Like many of the mimeograph magazines at the time, there were many advertisements inside that would promote readings and new small press books being published. *Beatitude* was the source

for underground information in 1960s San Francisco. For Neeli Cherkovski, “Those first editions were truly a ‘neighborhood’ happening, gathering material in a spontaneous manner and cranking it out on an unpretentious mimeo machine at the Bread and Wine Mission, a North Beach hang-out for the city’s bohemian community. From the beginning it was a true ‘beatnik’ effort, permeated with coffee house aroma, and has pretty much remained so through the years” (*Beatitude Golden* xvi). This magazine soon became the voice of the Beat movement out of the West Coast and has been the one of the most successful journals in the history of mimeograph magazines.

Since the mimeograph revolution, hundreds of small presses have started and thousands of little magazines have arisen. As the technology became cheaper, the magazines and even books became cheaper to produce. Michael Gabriel in his article, “The Astonishing Growth of Small Presses,” writes, “The rapid adoption of offset printing in the 1950s and 1960s brought the cost of manufacturing books down to a scale more easily absorbed by small businesses. Next came computer typesetting, which further reduced the time and labor costs of composing text for the press” (Gabriel 66). For many people looking to produce their own literary and poetry community’s work, the cheap production equipment has certainly made it possible. Many of the magazines are short lived, but the influence they had on the underground scenes have made them almost indispensable for news about happenings, readings, and smaller publications. What these little magazines did, starting with the mimeographs, is create a community with a press that circumvents the usual mainstream media

outlets. Another unexpected effect was that for the first time there are more people interested in publishing as well as writing. Ruth Gottstein, head of Independent Publishers Services, commented: "What we're seeing is a Renaissance of intelligent publishing. People have become a lot more serious. Instead of just getting a few poems or short stories out, they want to become publishers" (Gabriel 65). The creation of small presses and little magazines is the legacy of the Beat Generation and its low-cost publishing venture. The intention behind the small press and little magazine production was to circumvent the traditional media outlets and create an alternative news source and since the beginning it has not stopped producing presses and magazines.

However much the printing work had done for the promotion of the Beat Generation, there was another contribution they made to the mainstream world: the experimentation of relationships and sexuality. Throughout the community of the Beat Generation the relationships they had ended up in their writing. One of the strongest principles behind the Beat philosophy is that the personal be written honestly, but in order to challenge social traditions in writing they must also do so in life. The relationships they had were perhaps the most volatile and socially challenging than any other writers' groups in history and this personal life, reflected in the literature, helped to change the mainstream world's view of relationships and sexuality.

Part III: Beat Relationships

The Beat Generation, being a community of outsiders, always pushed societal taboos and often challenged the status quo. There was no area so dangerous and controversial for the late 1940s and 1950s than queer and interracial relationships. The Beat community has always been home to difference, not just in ideas and writings, but lifestyles as well. From its early inception, the Beats have had their fair share of complicated relationships that helped to build and complicate what being “Beat” means. They have always been a community of friends and sometimes those friendships would become intimate even if it crossed sexual preference. There are three very different relationships that helped shape the Beat Generation: The William Burroughs/Joan Vollmer relationship which crossed sexuality lines; the Jack Kerouac/Alene Lee relationship which crossed racial lines in life and in print through Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans*, and finally the relationship and marriage of LeRoi Jones and Hettie Cohen that resulted in children and the creation of the Beat magazine.

This aspect of the Beat community saw the most amount of failure because all three of these relationships ended horribly. The Burroughs/Vollmer relationship ended in death, Kerouac/Lee ended in heartbreak, and the Joneses ended in divorce with Hettie Jones left to raise two children alone. None of these relationships escaped the pressures of the social values of the times. They were young and idealistic and they found that the idea was much less complicated than the reality. These relationships are cautionary tales for most

people because they are examples of failures in challenging the mainstream, but they broke through barriers for others to try and do it better.

A Queer Beat Lover Affair: Joan Vollmer And William S. Burroughs

In 1983, Allen Ginsberg sat down with documentary filmmaker, Howard Brookner, to talk about his good friend, William S. Burroughs. In that interview, Ginsberg tried to explain the unusual relationship between Burroughs, an openly gay man, and Joan Vollmer, a straight young intellectual woman. In that interview, Ginsberg said, "Jack [Kerouac] and I decided that Joan and Bill would make a great couple. They were a match for each other, equally tuned and equally witty and funny and intelligent, equally well-read, equally refined" (Miles, *Jack Kerouac* 73). It was in fact 1944 when Burroughs and Joan Vollmer met and instantly there was an attraction, but it was not an attraction in the traditional romantic sense of sexuality. The attraction that occurred between them was rooted in wit and intellect that blossomed into a friendship that could best be categorized as a queer relationship. According to Jennifer Doyle, in her article, "Between Friends," "...queer relationships between men and women as a form of attachment...can disturb both the presumption of an 'us' and a 'them' and the opposition of desire and friendship" (325). In this sense, Doyle is implying that normal relationships, [normal being used as traditional romantic] desire and friendship are always at odds and that romantic desire always connotes sexual attraction, while in queer relationships, friendship plays a larger role serving to queer the traditional understanding of intimate relationships. In

the instance of this “queer relationship,” the concept of intimacy needs to be reevaluated. The case of Joan Vollmer and William seems to fit Doyle’s definition of a queer relationship where sexual desire does not trump friendship, but friendship trumps sexual desire. The term “queer relationship” refers to a relationship that does not operate within the traditional social constructs of binary heterosexual/homosexual relationships. The case of Joan Vollmer and William Burroughs as an example of a queer relationship is a cornerstone relationship in the Beat community.

William S. Burroughs was certainly queer in every sense of the world, not only because of his sexuality and interests, but queer in the sense that he never accepted an archetypal role in society. Because of this, Burroughs found camaraderie in underworld characters that seemed to live life on their own terms and answered to no one. Although Burroughs enjoyed this world, he never fully immersed himself, always keeping one foot in the legitimate world and one foot in the underworld of drugs and crime. He also never stopped taking courses and educating himself; he took psychology courses at Columbia University, went to Harvard and studied anthropology, and even attended lectures given by Alfred Korzybski on his new theory, General Semantics. He experimented with drugs and would be associated with them his entire life. Like his curiosity about the underworld, he also had a deep curiosity about drugs because when he was a child he had an accident where he was given a shot of morphine. Burroughs later recalled that this piqued his initial interest: “As a boy, I was much plagued by nightmares. I remember a nurse telling me

that opium gives you sweet dreams, and I resolved that I would smoke opium when I grew up" (Grauerholz 5). As a drug addict, Burroughs was also "queer" because he approached drugs, not for recreational use or to deal with pain, but because of a medical curiosity.

It was this interest in drugs and the underworld that would lead two young Columbia students to his door in Greenwich Village in 1943. In Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee's book, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, Allen Ginsberg relates his first impression of Burroughs: "I remember Burroughs describing a fight that he'd seen on the floor of some dyke bar, in which this guy had bit somebody's ear. And I think Bill had said, 'Tis too starved an argument for my sword.' It was the first time I ever heard Shakespeare quoted with intelligence. 'In the words of the immortal bard, 'Tis too starved an argument for my sword.' So I wondered who this intelligent aristocrat was" (36). William Burroughs made a lasting impression on them and they continued to visit him and soak up his seemingly abundant knowledge. Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac were in awe of Burroughs' vast knowledge, especially his knowledge of the revolutionary theories of Korzybski's work on semantics and his knowledge of psychoanalysis. His intelligence seemed unparalleled to anyone they knew, save one person, Joan Vollmer.

Joan Vollmer was attracted to intelligent men who were cynical and a bit sarcastic, but also let her speak her mind. In many ways, the men that she chose to have relationships with became important characters in the Beat narrative, like John Kingsland and Duncan Purcell. Kingsland was a well-educated

younger version of William S. Burroughs without the sophistication. Duncan Purcell was well versed in psychoanalysis and would instruct Kerouac, Burroughs, and the others in Freudian dream interpretation (Nicosia 126). Joan seemed to surround herself with the most educated and open-minded men that New York City had to offer, but it was not enough that they were educated and open-minded: they had to be atypical. Joan Vollmer attracted the misfits of "normal society." Joan would spend her time between college students and social outcasts: "Joan had friends like Dicky, a Broadway street person, and Alex, an old artist from Greenwich Village, who painted murals in bars in exchange for drinks" (Nicosia 111). Because she had a large apartment and lived alone, many of these "social outcasts" began to congregate at her home, which Joan encouraged.

In the opening pages of *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac describes Joan Vollmer as "Jane Lee the same, sprawled on the Oriental cover of her couch, sniffing at the *New Yorker*" (7). Joan Vollmer was a journalism student and Edie Parker remembers her poring over every newspaper she could get her hands on, and the *New Yorker* was her favorite to sniff at. Her constant questioning and "critical anti-everything drawl" (7) made her a perfect match for William S. Burroughs, or so at least Kerouac and Ginsberg thought. Allen Ginsberg spent several months living in Joan Vollmer's apartment, and while there, he noticed, "[Joan] Adams shared not only Burroughs's serious interest in drugs, but also his disdain for politics and politicians" (B. Morgan 67).

Burroughs had a voracious appetite for not only learning new and interesting facts, but also experiencing new things. Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Joan Vollmer were experimenting with drugs during this time. They were mostly using marijuana, some amphetamines, and lots of alcohol, but it was Burroughs that introduced them to the underworld drug culture. Joan Vollmer was just as fascinated with the seedy underworld and its inhabitants as were Ginsberg and Kerouac. That connection to the underworld was one of the qualities that attracted Joan to Burroughs. The other qualities that attracted Vollmer to Burroughs were his intelligence and his southern gentleman swagger. Burroughs and Vollmer hit it off from the start and even though Burroughs was gay, he found Joan fascinating in a way he never felt about a woman. In an interview with Ginsberg's biographer Barry Miles, Burroughs recalls his first impression of Joan Vollmer:

She was a very extraordinary woman and we got talking, exchanging ideas. She was the smartest person around, certainly as smart as Allen, in many ways smarter, because Allen still had decided limits to his thinking, and she didn't. So that was the basis of the attraction—an intellectual, not the usual talks about nothing. She had a sense of humour and it was more humour my style. (qtd. in Miles *Ginsberg* 67)

Both Burroughs and Vollmer came from upper-class families and “country club existence[s]” and both revolted against that kind of lifestyle for a “New York bohemian life” (T. Morgan 93). Although not much is known of

when Joan Vollmer began to drift away from her parents' way of life, we do know that as a child, Burroughs had lofty dreams of becoming a writer, and from an early age he kept a diary that contained entries of his romantic interests in other boys (See Grauerholz's *Word Virus*). When attending the Los Alamos Ranch for Boys in New Mexico, Burroughs ran into trouble when he was caught distributing chloral hydrate, or "knockout drops," to some of the other boys. This incident lends to Burroughs' future role of drug experimentation, where he experimented as much on his friends as he did himself. Though because of this incident, his personal diaries were confiscated, and after he was expelled and sent back home, Burroughs destroyed his diaries, calling them "dangerous pages" (Grauerholz 6).

William S. Burroughs and Joan Vollmer had a unique relationship, and many of the other Beat characters recognized it. There were times when Bill and Joan would play telepathic games where Burroughs would draw something on a paper and Joan would guess what it was. They did this with cards and even tried to read each other's minds. Lucien Carr was present for one of their psychic games back in New York City (See T. Morgan). They would sit across from each other and divide a paper into nine pieces. Then they would divide the pieces up between and draw pictures in the squares. When they finished, they would compare the drawings, and many of the pictures were the same. According to Carr, if one had drawn a scorpion, the other had drawn a scorpion: "To Lucien, this degree of telepathic communication was spooky, and it seemed to him that if either of the two was psychically stronger it was she, that if any

signals were being sent, like saying I will draw a rat and you will also draw a rat, they were coming from her" (T. Morgan 177). Although Burroughs had been married once before, he had never had a serious relationship with a woman, but he felt a connection with Joan Vollmer that he could not ignore. They shared the same interests from Mayan codices to Reichian psychiatry to a love of underworld figures. As Jack Kerouac wrote in a letter to Allen Ginsberg in 1952: "Joan made him great, lives on in him like mad, vibrating" (*Letters* Vol. 1 353). In this letter Kerouac recognized the elimination of the binary opposition of self vs. other, and it is almost as if Vollmer and Burroughs were joined as one person.

In a conversation with his brother Mortimer, William Burroughs tried to explain what the attraction was between Joan and him:

You know, a lot of people never understood about me and Joan. I never promised Joan anything. She stayed with me because, well, we had a kid, you know, and we enjoyed each other on a lot of levels...I guess I was exciting for her and, actually, she was a terrific woman, very amusing. I mean Joan was up for things, you know. Remember Texas? Joan and I had a lot of good times in Texas. But, I guess, I was never let's say, a particularly conventional kind of guy. I mean, I did my best. I did my best. You know, when we met in NY it was exciting. I mean, I enjoyed Joan as a woman, as much as I, you know, enjoyed women like that....it was just, well, I needed more, you know, and she couldn't do it for

me, so she took a lot of benny [Benzedrine], she was high a lot, but we had good times. (Mortimer Burroughs Interview)

Of the many levels that Bill enjoyed with Joan, sex was certainly one that rose to the surface early in their relationship. Even though Burroughs was primarily homosexual, he and Vollmer had a very active sex life. Joan once told Bill, "You're supposed to be a faggot. You're as good as a pimp in bed" (Watson 60). In May of 1948, their sex life became a matter of public record in Beeville, Texas. While driving down to South Texas, Joan coerced Burroughs into having sex or as Burroughs recalled, "Joan got the itch" (Morgan 147). While Bill and Joan were copulating alongside the road, someone driving by saw them and called the sheriff. Burroughs was arrested and fined \$175 and had his license suspended for six months.

Probably the most important connection that Burroughs and Vollmer shared was their addictions to drugs. Burroughs' drug of choice was always "junk" (a blanket term that encompassed all of the strong synthetic opiates), while Joan Vollmer's drug of choice was Benzedrine. In the 1940s and '50s, asthma inhalers had one major active ingredient, and that ingredient consisted of two strips of paper saturated in Benzedrine (See Nicosia). All that a drug user had to do was crack open the inhaler, take out the strips, ball them up, and swallow them. Jack Kerouac and Joan Vollmer really took to bennies, and soon bennies became the drug of choice for the Beats. Kerouac liked them because he could stay up for days writing and talking, but Joan became addicted to them,

and it would be the biggest nail to her early coffin. The only person who did not take to Benzedrine was William S. Burroughs, who preferred heroin.

Like Vollmer, Burroughs fought a lifelong battle with his addiction. Drugs would be a common theme in all of his work from *Junky* to his last novel, *The Western Lands*. According to David Ayers, in his article "The Long Last Goodbye: Control and Resistance in the Work of William Burroughs," "Heroin addiction provides Burroughs with the metabolic model of control which structurally informs other models of control which he will subsequently employ" (225). Addiction was a common theme that he could not shake from his life either. His addictions not only shaped his writing style, but they overwhelmed his life as well. There were several times that his addiction landed him in jail, and each time, Joan would come to his aid.

Common Law Man And Wife: Joan Vollmer Becomes Joan Burroughs

In a letter to Edie Parker dated December 29, 1946, Joan Vollmer tells her friend to address her not as Vollmer. "Although we're not married," she writes, "(Bill got a divorce, but I haven't), make it Mrs. W.S. Burroughs."⁵ Joan would devote herself to Burroughs, no matter what kind of trouble he would cause for himself and their family. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg detailing the troubles since living with Burroughs and jumping across the country to avoid the law, Joan writes, "It makes things rather difficult for Bill; as for me, I don't care where I live, so long as it's with him."⁶ This deep commitment to Burroughs would be her undoing because it caused her to neglect her wellbeing as well as

their children's. Burroughs was often more interested in chasing boys and junk than being a husband and a father. Joan was too in love with Bill to see the damaging lifestyle they led and even tried to ignore how badly he treated her.

Throughout the course of their four-year common-law marriage, Burroughs would often receive criticism for his treatment of Joan Burroughs. Herbert Huncke, who spent the most time with the couple, noted that Joan and Bill kept separate rooms, and he never saw them have a physical relationship. Huncke recalled that, one night at the New Waverly, Texas, ranch when he was having trouble sleeping, he heard a knock and a door open. He then heard Joan's voice, "All I want to do is lie in your arms a little while" (T. Morgan 137). To Huncke, Joan and Burroughs' relationship seemed distant because Burroughs never expressed any emotion for her, only for their son, Billy. Although Burroughs had trouble expressing his feelings for Joan, he was always quick to defend her, such as the time when Huncke commented on her spending habits. Burroughs snapped back at Huncke in defense of Joan. Allen Ginsberg was often one of the harshest critics of Burroughs about his life with Joan. In a letter to Burroughs, Ginsberg accuses him of "living a lie" to which Burroughs responds:

Now this business about Joan and myself is downright insane. I never made any pretensions of permanent heterosexual orientation. What lie are you talking about? Like I say I never promised or even *implied* anything. How could I promise something that is not in my power to give? I am *not* responsible

for Joan's sexual life, never was, never pretended to be. Nor are we in any particular mess. There is, of course, as there was from the beginning, an impasse and cross purposes that are, in all likelihood, not amendable to any solution. (Burroughs, *Letters* 45)

As much as Bill and Joan tried to make this "queer relationship" work, they encountered problems besides the normal relationship issues of intimacy; Burroughs was dealing with his own sexuality. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg discussing Ginsberg's psychoanalytic approach to curing his own homosexuality, Burroughs refers to homosexuality as a "condition" (Burroughs, *Letters* 69). At the time when Burroughs and Ginsberg were discussing their homosexuality, Ginsberg's father was strongly pushing the psychological cure on him. This was something that was a point of contention between Burroughs and Ginsberg and Joan would often be the pressure point in that argument. Ginsberg thought that he was trying to use Joan as a shield so that Burroughs' parents wouldn't know he was homosexual and that he was being unfair to her, but Burroughs would never admit that was what he was doing. Joan, on the other hand, dealt with his homosexuality and her own sexual needs by turning to drugs and drinking in an effort to ignore the major issues of their relationship.

The queer relationship of Joan Vollmer and William Burroughs was fraught with problems, such as drugs, extreme behavior, and different sexualities. However strange this relationship seemed to the outside world and even to their friends, they lived life on their own terms in completely uncharted

territory. The 1940s and 50s were certainly not a time for being queer and Burroughs and Vollmer dared to live their lives outside the normal constructs of society. Of course, one can never forget that this relationship ended literally at the hands of William Burroughs, and Joan Vollmer's story can only be interpreted through Burroughs and the rest of the Beat community. However much this relationship seemed to be doomed to fail from the beginning, we cannot forget that Bill and Joan did share an intimate space like no other. This relationship was one that left an indelible mark on the Beats and their successors, but perhaps the most impactful relationships came later with the challenging of America's racism. Two years later, Jack Kerouac would get involved with an African American woman, Alene Lee, and that union would end up as one of the most socially challenging novels of the time, *The Subterraneans*.

Jack And Alene: Blending The Color Line

In January of 1992 Alene Lee lied on her deathbed with her daughter by her side and Allen Ginsberg chanting mantras at the foot of her bed. A few days earlier she had called Ginsberg from her New York City hospital bed and talked extensively about death. In that conversation, they discussed their lives and they also discussed Jack Kerouac. The brief affair and the subsequent publication of *The Subterraneans* was still a sore subject with Alene even after 45 years. According to Allen Ginsberg, "Her anger at him [Kerouac] was tribute to her closeness, it was 'personal' she said" (Miles, *Ginsberg* 545). Before getting

into why Alene Lee was angry with Jack Kerouac, this story needs to begin with William S. Burroughs returning to New York City after several years of living in Mexico and South America.

Burroughs may seem peripheral to a story about a love affair between Kerouac and Lee, but it was Burroughs who was the catalyst of the meeting of Jack and Alene. He arrived in New York in the summer of 1953 to work with Allen Ginsberg on a book about the search for the elusive drug yagé in South America. *The Yage Letters* was a compilation of letters between William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg discussing Burroughs' search for the drug. When Burroughs met with Ginsberg, Burroughs had only a pile of hand-written letters and so Ginsberg suggested that he hire a typist and assistant to help him piece together his manuscript. Ginsberg suggested a woman that he had befriended named Alene Lee. Ginsberg had met Lee through her affiliation with a group of artists and poets that hung out at such bars as the San Remo and Fugazzi's, which he called The Subterraneans. These artists were "Village hipsters mingled with cruising homosexuals, both of whom performed outrageously for tourists on weekends" (Nicosia 441). Alene Lee stuck out from the group for several reasons. One, she was probably the only black woman in this group of primarily "white" males, and two, she felt "more an observer than a participant in the subterranean scene" (Nicosia 442). When Lee took the job as Burroughs' typist, she was exposed to a different group of queer "white" men: the Beats. It was during this time that Burroughs' and Ginsberg's old friend,

Jack Kerouac, came back to town from taking one of his epic cross-country trips across the Americas.

At the time, Kerouac had only published one novel, *The Town and The City*, and it had been met with modest reviews and did not sell very well. That August Kerouac returned to New York City to live with his mother and try to write another novel. Although he took a lot of criticism for living with his mother, Kerouac was broke and had nowhere else to go. Kerouac did not spend much time in his mother's apartment; he spent it wandering the streets hanging out with underworld figures. Along with carrying on with drug dealers and hustlers, Kerouac spent plenty of time with his old friends, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. It was through Ginsberg that Kerouac was introduced to Alene Lee because he thought she would be good for him.

In an interview conducted by Gerald Nicosia in May of 1978, Alene Lee talked about the first time she met Jack Kerouac: "When she first met him she thought he was handsome, was struck by his Hawaiian shirt" (Nicosia interview). When Kerouac first met Alene, "He was drawn to her sultry beauty and low sophisticated, yet tenderly lisping voice" (Nicosia, *Memory Babe* 442). Alene was a part of the Subterraneans, the new hip group of New York City artists in the Village. According to James Campbell's *This is the Beat Generation*, the Subterraneans were "ultra-hip" and they "nuanced their diction and their dress at the sharp edge, listened to the harder jazz, were familiar with the harder drugs, knew which books were in and why, and why and when the last in-things went out" (138). Alene never saw herself as *that* hip; she was interested

in classical music and not jazz (Nicosia interview). In Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee's *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac*, Alene says that she liked the Subterraneans for their rebellion against the Eisenhower's "Everything is fine" propaganda, but she was not as elitist as they were (Gifford and Lee 175). Alene thought that they were too "ultra-hip" and preferred the "softer-edged, poetry-writing beat crowd" (Campbell 138). As for Kerouac, the issues were different because he really wanted to be a part of this new group of artists and intellectuals, but many of the Subterraneans were openly gay, flaunting their sexuality in a way that made him uneasy because for the most part he was still ambivalent about his bisexuality. Also, Kerouac deeply believed in spirituality and many of these artists could not see how spirituality had anything to do with hipsters. Alene Lee's main criticism about Kerouac's involvement with the Subterraneans was that "he was so busy wanting to get involved and know this one group of people who didn't want to know him. They [the Subterraneans] couldn't understand why he was coming at them in an incredible manner" (Gifford and Lee 175-76). Jack Kerouac's interest in the Subterraneans was something of artistic jealousy, but also because Alene Lee, a black woman, was a part of it. It is partially her race that attracted Kerouac to Lee.

Alene Lee was a black woman who grew up in Staten Island in a black working-poor family, which is different than a "white" working-poor family. Alene Lee told Kerouac biographers Gifford and Lee that as soon as she was old enough she moved to Greenwich Village because she wanted to be part of a

vibrant artistic scene (174). Deep in the heart of Manhattan, Greenwich Village housed many of the hipsters and rebellious writers and thinkers of New York City. Greenwich Village did offer a space for hipster artists and in 1953 it had become the central space for the Beats. It is unclear how Alene Lee became involved with the Subterraneans, but when Kerouac first met Alene, she was the girlfriend of the painter, Anton Rosenberg (generally considered the leader of the Subterraneans). Jack Kerouac referred to Rosenberg as “the angel of the Subterraneans” (Campbell 138). What is interesting about the Subterraneans was that a black woman was a key member of the group, next to Rosenberg, Stanley Gould, and Gerd Stern. Alene Lee was nothing if not a paradox in her life and her involvement with both the Subterraneans and the Beat Generation. Although race is not something that Alene raised very much in her entry into *Jack’s Book* or in her interview with Gerald Nicosia, it is certainly something that she could never escape because she wore her difference on her skin.

One of the attractions that Alene had for Jack was rooted in his ethnic look. In *Jack’s Book*, she says, “Jack was incredibly good-looking, really handsome. He had big blue eyes and black, Indian-type hair” (Gifford and Lee 175). In Gerald Nicosia’s biography of Kerouac, *Memory Babe*, Alene says she was taken by his dark good looks (442). In both of these accounts, Lee refers to Kerouac’s ethnic looks as a point of attraction for her. While Kerouac’s motivations for his attraction have had plenty of space in *The Subterraneans*, Alene motives for her involvement with Kerouac need more attention. First, she was a black girl from Staten Island and Kerouac was a French Canadian from

Lowell, Massachusetts. What on the surface seems like the story of a white's man love affair with a black girl becomes complicated when the concepts of "white" and "black" are complicated.

As discussed in Chapter II, Kerouac was a "white ethnic" who had whiteness thrust upon him and this complicated his racial identity. Alene Lee was a black woman living in New York City in the 1950s and did not gravitate toward Harlem, which many Black artists were doing during this time. Alene Lee seemed to be drawn more so to Greenwich Village than Harlem. Something about the Beat Generation and the Subterraneans was attractive to this Black woman from Staten Island in a way that the Black Arts Movement was not. The attraction may be embodied in Jack Kerouac and his representation of the Beat Generation. In the interview with Nicosia, Alene Lee had one thing to say about race and Jack Kerouac: "I didn't want to ask Jack what he felt about race."

Race was always a personal issue for Lee that Kerouac could never recognize. Kerouac could blend into the white world, but Lee never could. She was always visibly different. Julian Carter writes that "white" people have never really talked about being white "[b]ecause white muteness about its raciality seems clearly connected to white irresponsibility in regard to its power, it is appropriate to push at that muteness in the process of its implantation, to explore the evidence it offers and how whiteness's self-definition as 'normal' facilitated white ignorance and innocence in relation to ongoing racial inequality" (19). It seems that Alene Lee's refusal to want to talk about race with Kerouac might be a direct result of this concept of power and silence. Alene Lee

is very aware of her position as a black woman with a “white” man; she understands the dynamics of their place in the American racial hierarchy, which is deeply rooted in colonialism. Jack Kerouac by virtue of his skin color and his gender is subjugated to the role of the colonizer, even if he himself has suffered as the colonized, he is still in New York City in 1953, in the colonizer position. Alene Lee being black and a woman cannot escape the colonized position; her agency is severely limited by race. Even though Jack is not quite “white,” he still enjoys a level of privilege that Alene could not ever enjoy by virtue of the colonial mindset of American society. She did not want to engage Kerouac in a serious conversation about race because by doing so she would expose Kerouac’s complacency in “white as normal”. Throughout his life, Kerouac always fantasized about living a “white man’s life” in North Carolina, which was, according to Gerald Nicosia, “mostly a fantasy of himself living like Faulkner on a homestead in the Deep South, discussing literature with some genteel doctor over a bottle of Old Granddad” (Nicosia 445). It was this dream that Kerouac claimed he could never live if he married Lee. In her interview with Nicosia she said, “I didn’t like his line about if he married me he couldn’t lead his ‘white man’s life’ in N. Carolina—because there’s plenty of black there too.” Alene understood that Jack couldn’t marry her because he was white and she was black; even though Kerouac was not quite white, he was also not black. As much as Kerouac wanted to have this romanticized “white man’s life” and be complacent in it, he couldn’t because he did not want to face his own prejudices and his own reasoning for wanting to be with her. To really be with her would

mean facing the truth about his “whiteness” and what that says about his “America.”

Jack Kerouac was always uneasy with his place in American society, as it existed in postwar America. Gerald Nicosia writes, “Jack [Kerouac] identified with America insofar as they both contained a great many paradoxes; and, as he saw it, it was important *not* to try to resolve them all” (*Memory Babe* 155). His unwillingness to resolve paradoxes is apparent in his relationship with Alene Lee, with whiteness and blackness. Jack Kerouac wants to remain somewhere in between the two worlds of “normal” white man and the eroticized world of blackness. Kerouac often delved himself in the “black” American culture of Harlem and became a regular at the most underground jazz haunts. His adoration of African American culture was so well known that he was able to attract artists of color to the Beat Generation like Ted Joans, LeRoi Jones, and Bob Kaufman. Kerouac’s love of African American and Mexican culture coupled with his folk Catholicism left him in a space between white and black because his own ethnicity did not allow him to be either. So, when Jack first met Alene, he saw a kindred spirit in incomplicity, both outsiders, both searching for a space that accepted their relationship.

Although the love affair between Kerouac and Lee only lasted one month, it has made a serious impression in the fabric of the Beat narrative. Kerouac wrote a novel about their relationship that still impacts how we read the Beat Generation and the inclusion of her as a model for the protagonist. Their relationship exposed the complicated racial relations in this country and

how racial issues deeply impact one's personal life. Alene Lee broke up with Jack Kerouac because he pushed her away to pursue his literary pursuits and also because she was afraid to really confront Kerouac about his thoughts on race. As for Alene, race is something that she could never avoid, even in the unique space of the Beats. Lee ended their relationship out of anger. As Alene Lee related to Ginsberg, "Her anger at him was tribute to her closeness, it was 'personal' she said" (Miles 545). Her anger was rooted in his philandering with men throughout the course of their courtship. Her anger with him was also rooted in his bringing out their personal relationship out for the whole world to see. Finally her anger with him was his unwillingness to recognize the inherent racism in himself with regards to her.

The Beat Breaks Down At The Black/White Color Line: The Marriage Of Hettie And Leroi Jones

The relationship between Hettie Cohen and LeRoi Jones is an evolution from Kerouac and Lee's because it involved a marriage, children, and a literary partnership. Before Jones made his life-altering trip to Cuba and adopted Black Nationalism, he was a fringe figure working at a jazz magazine and becoming an established poet and writer. While working at the *Record Changer*, LeRoi met a young Jewish woman who was actively pursuing a literary career, mostly in editing. Even though the magazine they were both working at would not last long, it allowed a friendship and attraction to foster and grow into something that would define them both.

When Hettie Cohen first met LeRoi Jones, she was working part-time for Dick Hadlock as the subscription manager for *The Record Changer*. Cohen was from Laurelton, Queens, New York, born into a lower middle-class Jewish family that had cultural ties to Judaism but like Ginsberg were mostly secular and culturally Jewish. Like Ginsberg, her parents' families had immigrated from Poland and Russia during the Pogroms and had landed in New York. While in America, her parents only spoke Yiddish amongst themselves, leaving their children to view Yiddish as a secret language that they used to talk about them behind their backs. Hettie never learned Yiddish as a part of her cultural upbringing; many times her father would shield her and her siblings from these traditions so that they would fit into American society. However, her parents could do little to shield her from the racial and cultural dynamics of Brooklyn and Queens.

In her memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Hettie writes about her childhood neighborhood, "But there wasn't much for me in Laurelton, where we'd come from polygot Brooklyn; no Negroes, Hispanics, Italians, only some Anglos and Irish who couldn't afford to move away from the Jews. I went to school with their children, but never to their homes. There was a firm inevitability to this; you just didn't mix, exactly the way you didn't serve milk with meat" (8-9). This racial rule was something that Hettie Cohen would challenge as she grew into a woman and as she would fall in love with LeRoi Jones. Growing up in post-Depression pre-War America, Hettie experienced a world where she was able to attend a Music and Arts High School, but was

constantly told that the best way to succeed was to marry wealthy and keep quiet. Hettie Cohen had other plans because as she declares, “Unlike any woman in my family or anyone I’d ever actually known, I was going to *become*—something, anything, whatever that meant” (H. Jones 10). At the age of seventeen, she left for Mary Washington, the women’s college of University of Virginia. While at Mary Washington she pursued her interest in literature, which would eventually lead her back to New York, but this time to the Village.

Upon arriving in this new area of New York she writes, “only the Village seemed real” (18). Hettie Cohen came to Greenwich Village in 1955, at the height of the artistic renaissance of the Beat, Black Mountain, and New York School of poetry. 1955 was still two years before the publication of *On the Road*, which would catapult the Village into Beatnik glory, but the Village was still an active scene for the arts. For Hettie Cohen, who was determined to be a part of the literary world, the Village was perfect for her. Even though she had arrived at the Village through Columbia University (which at this time had begun allowing women to attend certain classes), she found her true education was on the streets and by working with characters like Dick Hadlock and his *Record Changer*. Also during her time at the Village she would get to know other kindred spirits such as Joyce Glassman, who was also an aspiring writer. Glassman would go on to become famous as Jack Kerouac’s girlfriend during the time of *On the Road*’s publication, but in 1955 she was like Hettie Cohen trying to defy the misogynistic literary world and have her own work published. Hettie was always in awe of Joyce Glassman because “She was

writing—a novel, already under contract—and that was her good fortune, I thought. We shared what was most important to us: common assumptions about our uncommon lives. We lived outside, as if. As if we were men? As if we were newer, freer versions of ourselves? There have always been women like us. Poverty, and self-support, is enough dominion” (H. Jones 81). Both Glassman and Cohen were women pushing boundaries in the 1950s; they lived and worked before the feminist movement really took off, but were still feminists in their own right.

The Village, though in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, was a complicated place to be, especially for independent women. Throughout her life, Cohen had to work and did not share the luxury of a middle-class lifestyle. Work became a constant throughout her time in the Village, which set her apart from some of the others in the Village who would simply frequent the Village on the weekends. Although, her family was in Laurelton, she was determined to live her life by her own means. Throughout her college years she was the only Jewish woman in a class of Protestants and so she tended to flock to the outsiders and being independent certainly made her one. So, when LeRoi Jones came into her life, she was already an outsider and the fact that Jones was Black did not deter her from pursuing a relationship with him. When LeRoi Jones first got to the Village he “could see the young white boys and girls in their pronouncement of disillusion with and ‘removal’ from society as being related to the black experience” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 156) and Hettie Cohen with her Jewish ethnicity and independence was one of these “white” girls.

Even though LeRoi Jones writes about Hettie as a white girl, she had a very complicated relationship with her “whiteness” since she grew up as Jewish and that was the staple of her racial and cultural identity. “Black/white was still a slippery division to me,” Cohen writes, “In Laurelton the rabbi had said Jews were a different people, but my schoolmate Mulligan’s priest assured her that I was another race” (H. Jones 34). This was always a point of confusion for Cohen because as much as she was told she was not white growing up, she was a “white” woman in 1950s New York, and this never settled well with her. It was not until she met LeRoi Jones that she began to realize that she was perceived as being a white woman. In the essay, “Keeping Up With The Joneses: The Name of Racial Identities in the Autobiographical Writings of LeRoi Jones/ Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones, and Lisa Jones,” Deborah Thompson writes, “[F]or Hettie, the shift in American Jewish identity from dark Semitic other to assimilated white standard didn't fit. She still felt other to white non-Jews, and identified in her romantic relationships more with other people of color” (Thompson 91). So when she first decided to get involved with LeRoi Jones, she did not think of herself as “white” and did not consider too much the social implications of an interracial relationship.

LeRoi Jones, on the other hand, was very aware of the perceived black/white dynamic and the implications that this kind of relationships could have. There were dangers, especially for a black man dating a “white” woman that Jones was well aware of, such as black men being beaten in dark alleys or worse. The Village offered some shelter from this kind of prejudice, but even in

the Village, LeRoi and Hettie's relationship still raised eyebrows. In 1957, when LeRoi and Hettie were entering into young love, LeRoi was still optimistic that things were not as bad as he believed. "I was open," Jones writes, "naïve, in the sense that I did not know what such a relationship involved—i.e., the black-white thing. I don't think [Hettie] knew much either, on the real side, above such a hookup. But she was much less naïve than I thought about the general man-woman connect" (Baraka 212). As their relationship intensified, Jones would become increasingly comfortable with their relationship. Jones even understood Hettie's Jewishness as not being quite "white" and in his autobiography; Jones writes that Hettie had an inferiority complex because of her Jewishness:

Going to Mary Washington had done nothing to eradicate her feelings of inferiority. The black middle class suffers from the same kind of malady, a lack of self-esteem caused by the great nation chauvinism that is so much a part of American life. White supremacy, anti-Semitism, they not only work on the victims to deprive them of material and spiritual ease but they can, with some of the victims, actually convince them that they are hated for correct reasons, and the victims take up this same view, only, of course, it is now self-hate. (Baraka 213)

LeRoi Jones understood this about Hettie and even understood that she was not quite "white" and never would be, but Jones still had to contend with what America saw her as "a white woman" and him, "a black man."

Hettie, herself, felt the pressure of being in an interracial relationship from her parents and some of her friends even though she writes, “For those who still don’t believe it, race disappears in the house—in the bathroom, under the covers, in the bedbugs in your common mattress, in the morning sleep in your eyes. It was a joke to us, that we were anything more than just the two of us together” (Jones 36). On the streets and in the outside world, it was a very different story, but for the most part they were accepted as a couple as long as they didn’t venture too far out of their own neighborhood. As LeRoi Jones became more and more successful as a poet and reviewer, they found themselves venturing out of their comfort zones to attend different events around the city and the country. Jones had learned how to deal with the looks and the occasional racist comments directed his way because of his relationship with “white” women. Hettie was not so experienced with this kind of racism in New York, until one night when walking down Bleecker Street:

We were walking, early evening, along Bleecker Street, arm in arm. The catcalls began and continued. There weren’t a half-dozen steady interracial couples in the Village. In 1950 thirty states still had miscegenation laws. I’d never even thought that. When I understood that the jeers were for us, I turned. Ready to fight or preach, whatever my inexperience required. Nobody called *me* names.

But just as quickly Roi grabbed my arm again and pulled me around. Not violently, yet with an urgency I felt right away.

“Keep walking,” he said. “Just keep on walking.”

It was his tone that made me give in, and only later that I realized we might have been hurt, or *killed*...The dangers became more obvious.

(Jones 36-37)

Their lives became more complicated when Hettie became pregnant with their first child and LeRoi offered to marry Hettie. It was definitely a step toward solidifying their relationship in a way that Kerouac and Lee could never have taken. While Kerouac and Lee's relationship occurred in '53, Jones and Cohen's relationship blossomed in the late 50s and early 1960s. One of the things that made Cohen's and Jones' relationship was the fact that LeRoi respected Hettie's literary ambitions and even encouraged her to write and edit with him. Together they created the magazine *Yugen*.

LeRoi and Hettie Jones (no longer Cohen) started *Yugen* magazine, which would be one of the first Beat magazines and probably one of the most famous. In this magazine, which Hettie helped edit and recruit writers for, the Joneses wanted to capture the "new consciousness" that was talked about, but no one had made a statement in print as of yet. "Our magazine—*Yugen*, a new consciousness in arts and letters," Hettie Jones writes, "was Roi's idea, but, as he's written, I 'went for it.' I think I threw myself at it, actually. Few magazines out of New York, to that date, had promised the new consciousness that everyone downtown agreed was just what the world needed" (Jones 53-54). The first issue included Allen Ginsberg, Jack Micheline, Diane di Prima, Gary Snyder and Gregory Corso, and was very much about challenging the status quo of American poetry. Many of the writers who went into *Yugen* were Beats, and the

Joneses involvement with the Beat Generation made it a Beat rag. LeRoi realized from the first issue that “[t]he magazine opened up a whole world of back-and-forth correspondence among other young writers...With [Yugen], I had plugged into a developing literary world and I was beginning to see its outline” (Baraka 222). But as time passed and the magazine became too apolitical for LeRoi Jones’ liking and he turned to more radical writers and ideas. Jones came to notice that he was the token Black writer in a group of white writers and his interracial marriage and interracial children created further complication. However, at the time he was coming of age in was a bit more accepting of interraciality, if only a little more because of the effect of the fledgling civil rights movement.

The rise of the civil rights movements had a dual effect on LeRoi because it became more important for him to be a part of the literary scene, but it also made him understand that his poetry had to be political. Hettie was very supportive and even encouraged LeRoi to become more politically active, which led to his trip to Cuba, which would forever alter the relationship between them. As racial tensions began to heat up in the South with the Civil Rights Movement and in the North with the rise of the Black Muslims, LeRoi Jones felt the need to be more of an activist than a poet. As much as Jones liked the poetic scenes he was a part of, he didn’t believe they were political enough; “The general line being that poets and politics ain’t cohabiting” (Baraka 237). This bothered Jones as he saw black children being hosed down by white cops in Alabama or a 14-year-old Emmett Till ending up lynched after smiling at a white girl. It was too

much for him not to become part of the fight and so he did. First, his poetry became more and more political such as his poem, "A Poem Some People Will Have to Understand," for example he writes:

*What
industry do I practice? A slick
colored boy, 12 miles from his
home. I practice no industry.
I am no longer a credit
to my race. I read a little,
scratch against silence slow spring
afternoons. (Baraka 237)*

Jones was beginning to become more aggressive about racial issues and in New York City, with the rise of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, Jones felt more inclined to be overtly political in his work. During this time of transformation, Jones began to disconnect from Hettie Cohen even though they had been together for four years and she had already taken his name. Hettie Cohen had become Hettie Jones and she had become a crucial element in the literary scene of the Village.

Hettie Jones worked much of the time that she and LeRoi were together. Her skills as a copyeditor for many major presses and magazines such as the *Partisan Review* allowed her to get manuscripts to the editors to review and even had influence in including many Beat writers in these mainstream publications. Hettie Jones brought LeRoi's work and the many of the Beat writers to the

attention of the editor of the *Partisan Review*. After reading the pieces she presented, he included writers like Frank O'Hara, Denise Levertov, and LeRoi Jones in the next issue, which for the first time ever in a mainstream publication or as Hettie Jones writes, "THE BEAT GENERATION, AN EXCHANGE, appeared in capital letters in a box on the cover. Below the title, Roi's name was dead center" (H. Jones 57). The Beat Generation had now broached the mainstream/underground wall and was now in the American literary scene's consciousness. Both LeRoi and Hettie Jones remain responsible for this major achievement, but their working relationship which lasted through several of LeRoi's manuscripts and four issues of *Yugen* came to end because of the growing racial tensions in American society. Every day that passed LeRoi's racial categories began to narrow, ignoring anything but Black and White. To him Hettie was becoming more and more white and LeRoi was more black and radical.

Then came the trip to Cuba. LeRoi Jones was asked to be part of a delegation of black artists and writers that the new Cuban government wanted to help spread the word about the new and improved Communist Cuba. "The Cuban trip was a turning point in my life," writes LeRoi Jones in his autobiography about the point in his life when poetry became political (Baraka 243). "I could fight back with what I knew of my own seeming disagreement with my U.S. peers, how I did have sensitivity to what was going on," (245) Jones writes after spending time with writers and thinkers like Robert Williams and John Henrik Clarke. Both of these men would play key roles in the Civil

Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960s. Also important was his meeting Latin American poets like Pablo Armando Fernández and António Nuñez Jiménez. As he had many heated debates with them, he realized that they used their poetry for the sake of helping their people and their suffering. “These young people,” Jones writes, “assaulted my pronouncements about not being political. It was the first time I’d been taken on so thoroughly and forcefully and by people my own age, my contemporaries” (244). While in Cuba, he realized that poets all over Latin America were activists as well as poets. They often were at the front lines protesting their government’s wrongdoings, along with other activists.

This way of using poetry for a political end changed something in LeRoi Jones, it touched something that he had always felt but could never articulate: “When I returned, I was shaken more deeply than even I realized. The arguments with my old poet comrades increased and intensified. It was not enough just to write, to feel, to think, one must act! One *could* act” (Baraka 246). It was on his return to New York that Jones had a fire ignited in him and he wrote his most famous play to date, *The Dutchman*. The play centers on an older white woman who torments a younger black middle-class man, until she ultimately kills him. At the end of the play before the young black man’s death, he delivers a monologue where he states his grievances with white supremacy, institutionalized racism, and the state of the black man in contemporary America. It was an extremely charged take on race relations in New York and America. This play did more than make him an important figure in the New

York Dramatic Circles; it opened him up to the new radical Black Arts Movement.

Throughout this time, LeRoi and Hettie were still together and Hettie even enjoyed the new fiery and dedicated LeRoi. They began to frequent the Five Spot, a place known for Black intellectuals and jazz artists and as Hettie recalls, “[I]ncreasingly the racial balance in our house shifted, as a black avant-garde—writers, musicians, painters, dancers—became part of the New East Village, just coming into that name” (Jones 172). Hettie threw herself into the Black rights movement every bit as much as LeRoi did. For Hettie, this was a cause she could support because according to Paul Berman in his book, *Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments*, “There is an old and slightly peculiar Jewish custom of rebelling against Jewishness by identifying with the most marginal of all possible groups, so as to rebel and still not assimilate into the mainstream; and this, too, played its part in attracting Jews to the black cause” (11-12). This custom certainly ran strong in Hettie, but LeRoi had concerns about her because to most people she was “white.”

The more LeRoi became political, the more he began to distance himself from Hettie. As John Panish writes, “As Baraka [Jones] and even Joyce Johnson (but not Hettie Jones) recognize (even if for slightly different reasons), the hope that the relationships between white and black Beats would be free from America’s racist disease was *only* a hope, *only* illusion” (37). This was so of Hettie and LeRoi Jones, the illusion they had shared for seven years ended when LeRoi decided he could no longer be a civil rights activist and be married to a

“white” woman. This was crushing news for Hettie Jones, who throughout their seven years had always held down a job while caring for their two children, Kelly and Lisa. In trying to rationalize his marriage to a “white” woman, LeRoi had to defend his marriage at every Black rights rally and civil rights meeting he attended. In his autobiography, he writes, “There had even been a magazine satire about me as the great white-hating militant finishing one of my diatribes and then going back to the dutiful white wife. But that had not bothered me, it had not affected my sense of myself or my regard, in whatever way that was carried, for [Hettie]. But now it was different” (Baraka 287). Jones felt he was taking too much criticism for his lifestyle, which he believed contradicted his Black Power ideology. So he made the choice to leave Hettie and seek only the company of black women.

This was devastating for Hettie and the fight that ended it all spelled it all out for her. It was an argument over her accompanying him to Washington D.C. with a jazz troupe. LeRoi did not want Hettie to come with him and when she asked him why not, he responded by saying, “‘I’m black, [Hettie]. I’m black and you’re, I trailed off. ‘White. I can’t do this, [Hettie]. I’m black.’” (Baraka 288). This was the last nail in the coffin of their seven-year relationship, and even though Hettie would have stayed with him until the bitter end, LeRoi Jones had become someone else. So the thing that had attracted to each other in the first place, their difference, was now gone for LeRoi. Hettie Jones had two children to raise, and even though LeRoi Jones’ family never abandoned Hettie and their children, LeRoi would have nothing to do with her after that point. It

was a relationship that ended in 1965, deep in the heart of the many achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Race relations at this time were at their most volatile and their relationship could not survive the changing society around them.

In the end the nationalization of race is what ultimately divided Hettie and LeRoi Jones. Hettie had become “white” even though she never thought herself so, and LeRoi had finally become Black, as he always wanted. Hettie retains LeRoi’s last name, even today. Deborah Thompson writes that one reason for keeping the name might be that by “taking on her black husband's last name, which for him was a ‘slave name,’ was for her a way of disavowing the white American racist identity which can be at its most virulent in ethnicities on the verge of edging into white privilege” (Thompson 91). For Hettie, though, it might be something more about her coming into her own self as a writer and a mother and that was not Hettie Cohen, but Hettie Jones. Their relationship ended because LeRoi could not reconcile the Black/White binary and see the simple-mindedness of such a category.

Being A Beat Community

The Beat Generation fostered a community that both promoted and practiced taboo forms of relationships. From its early inception in Joan Vollmer’s apartment to the type of relationships that they embraced throughout the 1950s and 60s, the Beat community has always been a space for experimentation and acceptance. From queer relationships to interracial and

open marriages, the Beats pushed the boundaries of what a relationship was supposed to be in mid-20th Century America, mostly as failed experiments. But because of their openness to accepting alternative relationships, they were able to attract a following that fostered its own community and eventually led to the continuation of the Beat movement. The work of many small presses and little magazines helped get the word out about the uniqueness of this community and in turn created its own community. Erick Mortenson in his book, *Capturing the Beat Moment*, recognizes that “The Beat desire to form collectives out of individual experience helps to elucidate the possible form of a viable social alternative” (Mortenson 161). The collectives started by the poetry readings were created by the publications of little magazines, which worked to create a group by virtue of simply printing a group of writers in the same issue. If the magazine was seen as a Beat magazine, then the writers inside were Beat. The same could also be said of the small presses who would gain reputations for publishing a certain type of literature. For the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement, the relationships that they make define the group that they are. Whether they are romantic relationships, friendships, literary, or being part of a poetry circle, the relationships that are made have always been the bond that keeps the movement alive.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS THE BEAT MOVEMENT NOW?

In the essay, "A Definition of the Beat Generation," Allen Ginsberg lists five different definitions of the Beat Generation that have evolved over time. In the last definition, Ginsberg writes, "The fifth meaning of the phrase 'Beat Generation' is the influence and artistic activities of poets, filmmakers, painters, writers and novelists who were working in concert in anthologies, publishing houses, independent filmmaking, and other media" (*Deliberate Prose* 238). The Beat Movement is influenced by the efforts of the Beat Generation laid out by Ginsberg and company. It continues through poets, scholars, and organizers who are directly linked to the Beat Generation through personal association or through their artwork. It is a practice that has never stopped from the early days in 1940s New York when the Beat Generation was simply an idea kicked around amongst three friends. What was started back then was not simply a new writing style or even a new literary movement; it was a social movement that used art as its vehicle. Poetry became the main driving force that has kept the Beat ideology alive for over sixty years, but the Beat Movement is not the Beat Generation. The Beat Movement has become a new entity with new ideas that blend together the ideology of the Beat Generation with the poetics and ideology of the cultures that the Beats represented in their early work. The Chican@, African American, and to some extent Native American cultures have had a huge impact on the Beat Movement with the integration of Slam,

multilingual texts, and a more aggressive political stance than its predecessor. Because of the involvement of Bob Kaufman, Raúl Salinas, Anne Waldman, and many others, the Beat Movement has become more diverse and complex than the Beat Generation. The only way to conclude this analysis of how the Beat Generation became the Beat Movement and continues to grow is to examine what the Beat Movement is, who is keeping it going, and how it survives. From the Jack Kerouac School and its place in teaching Beat philosophy to generations of new poets is discussed, to the influence of the Chican@ movement and its poetics on the Beat Movement, and finally to the spaces that promote and encourage the growth of the Beats, the movement continues.

Infiltrating The Academic World Through Creating Beat Writers

The Beat Generation had a hand in infiltrating the academic world, while still maintaining their anti-academic stance through the operation of their own Beat-inspired school. Currently the most active locale for the continuation of Beat philosophy is the Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. In her introduction to *Beats at Naropa: An Anthology*, Anne Waldman writes, "The Beat ethos of candor and community provided the initial impetus for the founding of the Kerouac School, and has served as a continuing source of inspiration" (12). This Beat ethos has for over thirty-eight years continued to turn out new Beat poets that have gone on to keep the Beat Movement alive. Many poets and writers from the Beat Generation have taught at this school, such as Allen Ginsberg (co-founder), William S. Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Ed

Sanders, Hettie Jones, Amiri Baraka, Gary Snyder, and Diane di Prima. This Beat space that is part of an accredited university has broached the ivory towers of academia and changed the narrative of higher education in America.

The Kerouac School started in the summer of 1974 as part of a Buddhist festival held by Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche—a Tibetan Buddhist lama. At the time, Rinpoche had recently founded the Naropa Institute (now Naropa University), the first Buddhist College in the United States. Rinpoche invited Anne Waldman, Allen Ginsberg, and Diane di Prima to this festival and from that meeting the idea for the Kerouac School emerged. That following Fall Semester the Kerouac School had its first classes and has since then it has blossomed into having a Bachelor of Arts degree in Writing and Literature, an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) program in Writing & Poetics, and in Creative Writing, as well as having a successful Summer Writing Program. Many of the former students and instructors of Naropa like Karen Minzer in Dallas and Lorna Dee Cervantes in San Francisco have gone on to promote Beat philosophy and the movement itself in their various communities. It is this center that has allowed the Beat philosophy to be nurtured and to adapt to the changing times. The school is a rare space because, as Waldman writes, “Student activists, bohemians, hippies, Zen, Tibetan, and Native American spiritual teachers, journalists, theater and dance folk, artists, and students representing every conceivable discipline have been drawn over the years to the nexus of energy surrounding the Naropa ‘experiment’” (Waldman, *Beats at Naropa* 12). For a university whose main focus is literature and creative writing, Naropa

University and the Kerouac School have garnered a favorable reputation and gained accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

So what makes the Kerouac School so important to the continuation of the Beat Movement? The answer to that is that the Kerouac School is a concrete place and space where Beat ideas are promoted and the faculty is composed of established writers and poets (many of whom have been and continue to be, Beat writers). The Kerouac School since its inception has been under the leadership of Anne Waldman (prominent Beat poet) and the mission for the school has always promoted being connected to the outside world. Anne Waldman, since her days as the director of the St. Mark's Project, in New York has been an advocate for poetry and the continuation of the practice of poetry. In an interview with Randy Roark, Waldman says, "I took a vow at the famous controversial Charles Olson reading at Berkeley in 1965 to never give up on poetry or on the poetic community—to serve as a votary to this high and rebellious art" (Schelling and Waldman 33). Waldman's commitment has never wavered and her pursuit of promoting the poetic community is clearly evident in her managing of the Kerouac School. However, Waldman could not have been as successful if not for her mentor, Allen Ginsberg.

Waldman started the school in coordination with Allen Ginsberg and for many years Ginsberg taught several courses at the Kerouac School. It has been Ginsberg's continuing presence in the school and his commitment to new and diverse ideas coming together as "free association" that have birthed more

diverse Beat poets. The teaching philosophy at the school instills a sense of social awareness and makes the students aware of the problems in their own communities. The students then are encouraged take action to change things for the better. As Andrew Schelling writes in *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of The Jack Kerouac School*, "The Kerouac School is an *akademi* of writing and poetics at which a peripatetic faculty gathers, disperses, and gathers again—a faculty that is out in the world—active, doing things, engaged" (Schelling and Waldman xii). The initiative for the faculty to be engaged with the social climate of the world is one of the unique charges of the Kerouac School. It is, by all means, a school where practice is just as important as scholarly pursuit. This form of teaching has become more accepted with the growth of other programs around the country that promote this type of social involvement with the surrounding communities like June Jordan's Poetry For the People at University of California-Berkeley. Naropa opened a floodgate that has led to the creation of many MFA programs across the country. Because of the Kerouac School there has been a cross-pollination of poetics, cultures, and philosophies that have helped create new and interesting spaces for poetry to flourish. One of the major cross-culturalizations is the influence of Chican@'s and Chican@ poetics on the Beat Movement.

The Beat Raza: The Chican@ Beat Driving The Movement

The current Beat Movement has taken its lead as much from Chicano writers like Oscar Zeta Acosta as it has from Jack Kerouac or from Raúl Salinas

as much as it has from Allen Ginsberg. These poets have chosen not only to continue the Beat philosophy but also to foster a community determined to continue. Mixing the African American influence and the Chican@ influence, which are not exclusive of each other, formed a new poetics. As discussed in Chapter III, aside from Bob Kaufman and LeRoi Jones, there is the creation of the Spoken Word movement and Slam that have become an active part of the African American poetry scene. As for the Chican@ influence, Raúl Salinas had much to do with the fostering of the Beat spirit through his organizing, his bookstore, La Resistencia, and his promotion of Beat writing. Apart from Salinas, Chicano writers like Ricardo Sánchez and Oscar Zeta Acosta have changed the Beat aesthetic through their work and lives.

Ricardo Sánchez is mostly known as a Chicano poet from El Paso, who was like Raúl Salinas, a pinta poet (prison poet). He spent much of his youth getting into trouble and when he was old enough, dropped out of high school to join the army. In the army he got arrested for robbery and assault and sent to prison. This was the fate of many Chicano's in the 1950s and 60s, but luckily for Sánchez he picked up his pen and began to write. It was in prison that Sánchez would get his first publications; "My first publication," Sánchez writes, "would be in now obscured, little, beat generation magazines that were mimeographed in San Francisco in 1959" (López 13). Sánchez challenged the traditional Chicano poetry of the time and wrote mostly pinta poetry or poetry about prisoners, hustlers, underworld figures, and life on the streets of the barrio. Sánchez was nothing if not a champion of the people, and he saw many

problems with the leadership of the Chicano movement: “Sánchez’s voice began to criticize the Movement’s leaders and motives. The dispute involved a number of persons whom Sánchez consider ‘self-appointed leaders.’ Sánchez brought his dispute into the open with his personal narratives about growing up poor, working class Chicanos and their families” (López 17). Sánchez’s outsider mentality was in sync with the Beat philosophy of speaking for the downtrodden by telling their own stories.

Ricardo Sánchez always wrote for the poor and working class as well as against the racism of the United States, but the biggest influence of the Beats on Sánchez was style. Sánchez’s Beat mentality set him apart and often created rifts between himself and other Chicano writers, but it is this enduring quality that has led others to follow his path to write pinta poetry as well as poetry for the poor working class. The best way he knew to do this was by writing in the voices he knew: the voices of the streets and the barrios. José Limón in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence on Mexican American Social Poetry* writes that Sánchez is “engaged with a collage of influences, none really master precursors, from pre-Hispanic, indigenous poetics to the ‘beat’ poetry of the fifties” (91). It is his style and his attitude that made him Beat and a figure, like Raúl Salinas, who changes the course of Beat poetry by making it more engaged with the Chicano and Native communities. In his Beat poem, “Ain’t Nuttin but a Stepper,” Sánchez writes,

i am a-steppin, long timer,
'cause i am now

chicano short timer
 and time no longer hurts,
 it just haunts,
 but i've got less than a month
 NETA-less THAN A MONTH-to go
 and kiss them bricks
 and swallow
 El Paso dust (Sánchez 25)

Another contemporary of Sánchez, who also lived an outsider life as a writer and activist, was Oscar Zeta Acosta, also known as The Brown Buffalo. Oscar Zeta Acosta is best known as Dr. Gonzo in Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but Acosta was a writer and Chicano activist in his own right. Acosta played a large role in the Chicano movement by being the lawyer who defended the Los Angeles 13, which was a group of high school students along with their teacher Sal Castro who staged a coordinated walkout of L.A. public schools with the code word "Blowout." When hundreds of Mexican American students began to walk out of school they were met with heavily armed police and violence ensued. The "13 ringleaders" were arrested and charged with inciting a riot. Acosta took the case and gained a reputation for being a Chicano lawyer for the people. But like Ricardo Sánchez, his relationship with the Chicano movement was tested because of his lifestyle and his brutal honesty about the movement and his own life. His two novels, *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *Revolt of the Cockroach People* were written in

Beat style, with only the names of characters slightly changed but the events in the books being actual events, much like *On the Road*. These novels were more autobiography than fiction, and his critique of America and its racist society were in scathing Beat fashion. In “*Chicanismo’s Beat Outrider? The Texts and Contexts of Oscar Zeta Acosta*,” A. Robert Lee writes, “It would be hard to pretend that there was ever the one Beat identikit or, if there were, that Acosta supplied in his life and art a perfect fit. But a ‘Beat’ personality is always very much there to be met with” (165).

In his first novel, *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, Acosta refers to himself as Mr. Brown and eventually as the Brown Buffalo, Chicano Lawyer. The novel is a journey into finding out who he really is and in many ways it is a way of finding his place in America. In many ways, *Brown Buffalo* is a response to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, but this time Acosta travels from the West to the East and into Mexico. While Kerouac was trying to find the true voices of America through observing the underclasses, Acosta is trying to find his own voice in America from an underclass position: a Mexican American. “His own ‘on the road’ escapades,” Lee writes, “equally count, not only in California but also Texas and Colorado. There is an undoubted Beatdom in his wish to find a lived, dynamic ‘spontaneity’ both in writing and the everyday round, even in his court and legal work” (Lee 165). His lifestyle and his writing style follow the Beat mentality for writing and it is something that Acosta took to heart after reading many of the Beats and having Hunter S. Thompson as his comrade in crazy adventures and as a writing confidant. Thompson, being a disciple of Jack

Kerouac, but writing from much more of a Hippie perspective than Beat writes, “I picked up the torch dropped by Kerouac and went on to become rich and famous...more or less” (qtd. in Martinez 118). Kerouac’s influence on Acosta is evident on his writing style as well as the subject matter he chooses to write about. In *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, Acosta writes, “I’m a historian with a sour stomach. I have no love for memories” and even though he agrees with Kerouac’s concept of recording of America, he does not romanticize it (18). Instead he takes a stand and proclaims a new proactive direction:

Ladies and gentlemen...my name is Oscar Acosta. My father is an Indian from the mountains of Durango. Although I cannot speak his language...you see, Spanish is the language of our conquerors. English is the language of our conquerors...No one ever asked me or my brother if we wanted to be American citizens. We are all citizens by default. They stole our land and made us half-slaves. We need a new identity...I propose we call ourselves the Brown Buffalo people...No, it’s not an Indian name, for Christ sake...don’t you get it? The buffalo, see? Yes, the animal that everyone slaughtered. Sure, both cowboys and the Indians are out to get him...and, because we do have roots in our Mexican past, our Aztec ancestry, that’s where we get the *brown* from...(198)

Acosta in his “Autobiographical Essay” writes his growing up in California and why that became the driving force behind his intent to write for the poor and working class. “The towns there were all the same,” Acosta writes, “built around the railroad tracks. On one side of them you had Mexicans; on the

other side you had the Okies and then further out you had the Americans. Where I grew up, the world was composed of that—Mexicans, Okies, and middle-classed Americans and nothing else” (*Uncollected Works* 5). In some circles, Acosta’s *Brown Buffalo* has been looked at as a Chicano *on the Road* and Acosta as a Chicano Kerouac. While Kerouac is mostly drunk throughout his work, Acosta is both stoned and drunk; taking every drug he can get his hands on. The role of drugs in the late 1960s and early 1970s had changed from the mind expansion notion of the 1950s and early 60s to escapism, which is how Acosta uses drugs in his novels and his life. Both Kerouac and Acosta’s novels have their fair share of outlaw behavior and the comparison between the two has some merit. However, Acosta did more than simply write about his experiences as Kerouac did; Acosta takes to action and becomes an activist, who follows a more political path than Kerouac and taking his cues more from Ginsberg and Kaufman. Acosta, coming of age in the time when Kerouac was taking his cross-country trips, has a much more critical look at America than Kerouac and *Brown Buffalo* is more of a coming of age novel than *On the Road* was supposed to be. Frederick Luis Aldama in his article, “Oscar ‘Zeta’ Acosta: Magicorealism and Chicano Auto-bio-graphé,” writes, “While traveling across the U.S., he ingests and then regurgitates all of U.S. mainstream culture, revealing his environs to be a society of the spectacle controlled by the magic of capital” (208). Acosta critiques the racist capitalist system of America and yet at the same time rides the edge of it, observing and ingesting every sort of drug he can to help him deal with it. This approach becomes commonplace for a Hunter

S. Thompson book, but for Acosta the drug-taking and crazy behavior comes to end when he takes up the torch of Beats like Ginsberg and Kaufman and starts fighting for the underprivileged and the oppressed. Because of this twist in Acosta's life, he takes Beat into a new Chicano direction, one of responsibility.

As a Chicano writer from San Antonio and professor at Ohio State University, Manuel Luis Martinez often teaches the Beat writers in his classes. As a writer he feels a deep affinity to the Beat movement because of the openness and inclusiveness of the Beat philosophy. In an interview about the Beat movement, he says, "The beat movement survives because the conditions they explored are still very much part of contemporary living: materialism, conformity, alienation from the 'grown up' world of meaningless labor and even more mindless consumerism." In his book, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera*, Martinez writes about the connections and disconnections of the Beat Generation and Mexican American Migrant literature. When Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published, Mexican American writer Tomás Rivera wrote a short story in response to Kerouac called "On the Road to Texas." This story is a parody of the *pachuco*⁷ in Mexican American culture to which Martinez writes that the protagonist "Pete Fonseca uses *pachuco* lingo, he so clearly represents many of the aspect of the Beat ethos that he may be Chicano literature's first, and perhaps only, Beat *pachuco*" (*Countering* 309). This story illustrates the connections between the Beat movement and the Chicano movement even though their goals and approaches varied greatly. They shared a common

interest in social justice and a dedication to the presenting of authentic “American” cultures in their own voices. In that same interview, Manuel Martinez says,

What I would say is that the Chicano movement, writers like Luis Valdez, Oscar Acosta, Corky Gonzalez, Alurista, Jose Montoya, and Raúl Salinas, forced the Beat Movement's neocolonial/orientalist fantasies of spiritual encounters with the Indian/Mexican/Arab "other" into a conversation in which this silent "other" is now doing the talking. In William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* the metaphor of the "talking asshole," which is figured as the colonized subject, the prospect of the marginalized subject gaining power through a loud voice is Burroughs' greatest fear. What Chicano Movement writers who were influenced by the Beats did, in my opinion, is talk back to that body of work and anyone who ignores that conversation is getting a simplified, incomplete understanding of the work that the Beats produced.

The Chicano influence infused a deeper sense of responsibility into the Beat Movement, but also opened the door for young Chicano kids to see a literature that was simply about finding an identity as a Chicano. What Beat writing does is infuse life of the streets, life in the barrios or colonias⁸, and allows them to tell their stories with a sense of exuberance of life through these outlaw practices, but also creates a sense of responsibility to their community through writing.

Responsibility is something that Chicano Beat Poet Raúl Salinas always promoted in his work and his life. The founding of his bookstore La Resistencia

was more than just having a space to sell the books he liked to read, it was about having a space for new poetics and activism to occur. Raúl Salinas spent much time in Seattle in the 1970s and he ran a little bookstore there to support the Native peoples of the area, but in the 1980s when Salinas moved back to Austin, Texas, he opened a new bookstore modeled on the one in Seattle. In an interview, Salinas says, "So we came here twenty-four years ago to the east side, back to where I had grown up and left and got in trouble and everybody knew me. I rented a little storefront on the east side, and opened a little bookstore with a book that I had just published, and three other books....We started out doing poetry readings" (Valdez 344). This little bookstore grew to become one of the most successful bookstores in both the Chicano and Beat worlds as a safe space for the continuation of poetry and activism. In talking about Resistencia, Salinas declares, "It's a 'safe space.' A safe place. It's safe because you can say whatever you want to. We are the strength. Here is one of those spaces. That's what we have tried to keep going" (Valdez 349). It is this space that has nurtured the Beat Movement and its continued existence because of Salinas' love for the Beat style of writing as well as for the activist impulse that is fostered within the movement. Even after Salinas' death in 2008, the bookstore continues its operations and its mission of being a radical safe space under the direction of Rene Valdez, a protégé and secretary to Raúl Salinas. Being a Chicano and Native-based space, the Beat Movement is very much invested in the support of Chican@ (both Chicano and Chicana ideologies).

The Beat Movement has a strong Chicana feminism influences coming from such Chicana poets as Lorna Dee Cervantes and Tammy Melody Gomez. Each of these women grew up in very different worlds and times, but both have been influenced and continue the legacy of the Beats. Lorna Dee Cervantes is a San Francisco based poet whose influence on Chican@ poetry has been monumental. She has been described by Chicano poet Alurista as “one of the major Chicana poets of the past forty years” (qtd. in Calhoun Mish 29). Though her work is usually associated with Chican@ and Native poetry, she has a deep Beat influence. In an article she wrote entitled “The Beats and Beyond,” Cervantes discusses her connection to the Beat Movement: “Really I know that my roots come out of the Beat movement. My roots come out of there in the way that all of our roots are intertwined, there, no so much in New York but in San Francisco, where I was born, in the Mission District” (Waldman, *Beats at Naropa* 113). Cervantes comes of age during the 1970s, a time when Chicana feminism was getting its legs as a cohesive movement with other Native and Chicana writers like Joy Harjo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga. Cervantes, like Salinas, connects her Chican@ heritage with her Native roots and this connection is evident in her work as well as in the community where she grew up.

Lorna Dee Cervantes learned Eastern thought through her father who was a Zen Buddhist and an artist, and from her mother and grandmother she learned about her Native and Latina roots. Because of these influences she

understands that she occupies a very Beat space. In that same piece “The Beats and Beyond,” Cervantes writes:

To me this idea, this linking to the Beats is much like the use of one of those Tibetan meditation gongs that you take up to the top of the mountain, you sound it like you sound this poetry. Not that I write like that, or anyone else writes like each other; but instead this tone dissolves the language and you travel on it. You send your soul out in this thing, this gong. So this is how I connect my coming out of the Beat movement.

(Waldman, *Beats at Naropa* 113)

Her connection deepened when she took a teaching job at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa University. Cervantes connected with Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg and her introduction to Beat poetry was through Ginsberg and his work. She connected with Ginsberg because she saw an acknowledgement of suffering that was absent from many other poetics at the time, but was present in Chicano poetry. “When I first discovered the poetry of Allen Ginsberg,” Cervantes writes, “my first thought was ‘at last, here it is, Chicano poetry’” (Waldman, *Beats at Naropa* 114). Cervantes believes that suffering is a key component in Chicano poetry that is available in Beat poetry. There is a freedom of language and a space that is created within Beat poetry that is not present anywhere else. That is a space that allows for fringe ideas and fringe characters to intermingle and create something new in style, such as the poems, “First Thought, Best Thought” and “This Is Beat.”

In “This Is Beat,” Cervantes writes,

Me and Cassidy
 and the open flower of a book, the open eyes
 of poetry, that tearing on the page. Listen!
 A thousand harps in the key of city lights
 chime on a sacred rising. Ten thousand strands
 of beads strung on a prayer. This hand now.
 The casual gifting of another meal. I want this
 now. The one last grace. To never fall.
 To play this now and do it all. This
 is Beat: The Way. The Way. Be an Artist.
 Now. (lornadice.blogspot.com)

Lorna Dee Cervantes finds a balance between her Chicana/Native identity and a Beat identity through her connections to a place. For Cervantes that place is San Francisco, the same space that the Beats championed and helped change the shape of in poetry and culture. Her connection to the Beat is a very locale-based one, but her work and her activism connect her to other Chicanas across the country like Tammy Melody Gomez, out of North Texas.

Tammy Melody Gomez came of age in the Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth poetry and music scenes in the 1980s. Throughout her career as a poet and performer, Gomez has edited two anthologies, *Yoniverse: In a Loud Kitchen* (Tejana Tongue Press, 1997) and *North Texas Neruda Love* (Tejana Tongue Press, 2005), as a small press publisher--with the support of grants from Humanities Texas and the City of Austin-Cultural Grants Office. As award-winning ("Best

Poet of Austin" and "1st Runner-Up, Hispanic Playwright's Festival--Fort Worth") poet/playwright, she has performed throughout the U.S., and in Mexico and Nepal. Gomez links her Chicana identity with growing up in a punk/beat poetry environment or as she related in an interview, "After college, back in Austin and then Fort Worth/Dallas, I took up with many young 20-something writers, musicians, and artists who revered the Beats and whose work then would have easily been considered proto-Beat or of a 1980s New Beat Movement. Many of us could quote Burroughs and Ferlinghetti as easily and readily as Dead Kennedys lyrics." Coming of age a generation after the Chicano and Chicana Feminism movements' heyday, Gomez is deep in the heart of the Beat Punk era, which balances both music and poetry with such performers as Patti Smith, Leonard Cohen, and Lou Reed. This influence, coupled with her Chicana background, creates a different Beat poetry in a different Beat Movement than the 1960s and 70s.

Tammy Melody Gomez came to the Beat Movement like most young poets in the 1980s, through her time in the university. As a young poet she struggled to find her identity as a Chicana and as a poet who didn't quite fit into a North Texas or a traditional Mexican American mold, so she decided to look elsewhere for inspiration, which is where she found the Beats. In discussing how she became exposed to the Beats, Gomez says, "I first became immersed in an exploration and 'discovery' process of the Beats when I was an undergrad student in the Baltimore area in the early 1980s. In the school library, while browsing the rad collection of literary journals there, I came across copies of the

Evergreen Review. The Evergreen Review totally kicked apart my raised-North-Texas world.” It was a mind-opening experience to come across such writers, both men and women that were writing with such honesty about their lives and for Gomez it ushered in a new way of looking at the world that was not present anywhere else. Her poem, “One Dude,” reflects her Beat influence:

"hey dude, am i a hallucinogen? do you have an expanded
reality when you're on me?
do you trip inhaling my lips? am i your alice in wonderland?"
forget oil of olay, tincture of lavender, salve of cinnamon.
this guy is getting into DMT of tammy. (Tammy Gomez)

Her poems, like Lorna Dee Cervantes’, reflect the place she grew up in and the stomping grounds she frequented. This poem in particular reflects her time in Austin and the Austin characters she hung around with. Since Austin is commonly known as “The Live Music Capital of the World,” Tammy Gomez was heavily influenced by music in her own work, and performance became a key element for her poetry. Since the 1980s, Gomez has been as much as a poet as a performer and has many times combined the two into performances before the term “spoken word” was known.

As a performer and a poet, Gomez utilizes many of the Beat techniques in poetics and in activism. In 2010, Gomez spearheaded an Arts Attacks Campaign called “The One Block Poem,” where she made a series of woodblocks that contained one word each and then laid them down across downtown Fort Worth, Texas in order to make the longest poem ever written on the streets of

Fort Worth. This event was used as a tactic to make the community of Dallas/Fort Worth aware of the poetry scene in the North Texas area. Through her creative forms of protest and her honest and “hip” language used in her poetry, Tammy Gomez has made a space for herself within the Beat Movement. When asked about her being a part of the Beat Movement, Gomez responded,

I feel a great affinity with the Beats because I have known or worked alongside some of the Beats and others who closely knew them. Their work informs me and makes me feel as if the Beat Era is a diasporic, time-traveling notion which has elasticized to accommodate my work and chronology as a comrade, or fellow artist who lives a Beatitude aesthetic and politic--for I am part of its lineage. I especially love that I am a Chicana/Latina, a feminist, and politicized artist from Texas who has been allowed a place in the sphere of the Beats. (Gomez Interview)

Tammy Gomez is one of many women who have an affinity with the Beats and have worked to change the narrative about what being “Beat” really means. The Beat Generation had already planted the seeds for the Chican@ and feminist to grow within its legacy of the Beat Movement. Mainly because of the position opened by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and others that Mexico and Latin America hold a valued place in “American” history and should be represented in it, the role of Chican@s in the Beat Movement only seems the next natural course.

Kerouac wrote more about Mexico than he wrote about his native homeland of French Canada and devoted more space in *On the Road* to a

relationship between himself and a Mexican American woman than any other woman in the book. Jose Olvera writes in his essay, "Jack Kerouac as a Mexican," "Like everything that Kerouac wrote about Mexico, and Mexicans, the love and respect shows through. For he is much more than a mere writer, he sees beauty even when there's no beauty, but only the lustful, bloody carcasses of life. He knows. He sees" (30). For some Chican@ writers, the Beats offer a space that is not available within the Chicano and Chicana movements that is not about ideology, but about technique and style. There is a freedom associated with Beat writing that is not present anywhere else and that freedom mirrors Chican@ poetry because of their shared affinity for suffering and a love of Mexican/indigenous and Latin American culture.

The Poetry Reading And The Beat Writing Space

The most common ways that the Beat Movement continues its legacy is through the continuation of poetry performance, the nonacademic writing workshop, and the poetry reading. Currently, Hedwig Gorski, a New Orleans based poet and performer has worked throughout her career to change and expand upon the performance poem. In the late 1970s to the early 1990s, Gorski worked to perfect what she called "performance poetry," which is a term meant to describe poems written to be performed rather read as text. Lesley Wheeler in *Voicing American Poetry* writes that in the 1980s, "Hedwig Gorski...coined the term 'performance poet'" (172). Performance poetry is a form of spoken word that came of age around the same time that Slam was gaining popularity.

However as Gorski explains in an interview, “I stopped writing for print publication. I wanted my audience to know I was not just scheduling ordinary poetry readings that I was writing only for my voice, not to submit to presses. I was writing only for radio, for my composer collaborator, my multi-ethnic band, for recordings, for the stage, not boring, safe, quiet white pages.” This shift in the poetry world changes how her poetry is written because it relies almost exclusively on the sounding of a poem, but this does not mean that there is no attention to the poetic execution of each piece. Like spoken word and Slam, the performance gets equal attention as the content of each poem. Early on in her career Gorski was involved in the Beat movement and took from Allen Ginsberg and others the power of the performance.

1977 was the year that Gorski chose to change her artistic medium from painting to poetry. It was the year that she discovered words and the musicality held better sway for her than the canvas and the visual representation. Her interest in the visual arts is one that she shared with the Beats because much of their technique and philosophy are closely tied with the artistic movements of the times. Kerouac’s sketching technique is a technique borrowed from the artist exercise of the same name and Burroughs’ cut-up technique is borrowed from Brion Gysin’s (visual artist) film technique. Art and poetry for the Beat Generation have always had a deep relationship because of the Beat desire to “capture the moment.” Gorski saw words and poetry as her next logical step and began to perform with a band in Austin called East of Eden. It is there that she began to develop her interest in performance and her concept of making

poetry based in performance. Hedwig Gorski fell into the Beat movement because the Beats offered something different in poetry, which was in the late 1970s, their dedication to performance as well as the printed poem. When asked what the Beat Movement means to her, she responded by saying that the Beat Movement is “Anti-establishment and arty youth movements, modern methods of distributing poetry, media darlings, self-promotion, making political engagement cool, meditation, non-theism as opposed to atheism, and all these things as opposed to nihilism.” But it is the promotion of oral poetry that Gorski has promoted as perhaps her greatest influence of the Beat movement on her. In the 1980s there was a shift occurring in the poetry world that was turning away from the printed page to the microphone and the stage.

The 1980s saw the rise of spoken word and Slam from several different locales such as the Green Mill in Chicago as run by Marc Smith, the Nuyorican Café as started by Miguel Piñero and Miguel Algarin, and in Austin, TX there was the poetry scene that included PaperBacks Plus and Resistencia. Austin in the 1980s saw a collection of writers and performers that centered on one location in particular and that was Paperbacks Plus run by Chuck Taylor and Pat Ellis Taylor (Pat Littledog). In the basement of this bookstore were regular monthly readings with poets like Hedwig Gorski, John Wright, Jim Cody, Roxy Gordon, and Karen Minzer. Through this space there was a celebration of Beat and Hippie culture and a space for Beat poetry to flourish. This bookstore, which had two different locations, was perhaps the center of the Austin poetry world in the 1980s and helped to foster a community of poets and writers that

would go on to continue the legacy of the Beat Movement through other avenues. Karen Minzer, aka Karen X, is perhaps one of the best links to the Austin poetry scene and the Dallas poetry scene.

Karen Minzer is currently the director of Wordspace in Dallas, Texas, which is a space for writers, poets, performers, and artists to read and offer talks about their work. Wordspace is the end result of Karen Minzer's life goals. Minzer became a Beat poet through a direct connection to Allen Ginsberg. In an interview she says, "I'm a former student and friend of Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, studied in poetics apprenticeship with Allen Ginsberg and typed one of his diary notebooks to manuscript." She has lived a particularly Beat life, being a junkie and a poet/performer for many years in her youth. She felt a great affinity with Allen Ginsberg and even wrote a couple of poems with him. Karen went to the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics to find herself as an artist and found herself deeply affected by the work done at this school. From her time at the Kerouac School, Minzer learned that she must make a stance against the injustices of the world and the best way to do that was through poetry. Her poetry when she came to the Kerouac School was very "free association" and Ginsberg told her that she "had no particular observation or common sense in [her] poetry." In that same interview, she recalls, "He said he loved my 'genius for free association' and not to go back to school that it would ruin me as a poet, but to continue reading, living life and study on my own—especially since at the time my lifestyle was very focused on health and study--except for smoking pot, clean and athletic" (Minzer). This piece of advice

stuck with her and she did just that by returning back to her hometown of Dallas and starting to get involved in the poetry scene there.

In the late 1970s she would move back in Dallas where she would meet Robert Trammell, Roxy Gordon, and Judy Gordon, who would help her to develop a writing community in Dallas. In her first meeting of these poets, Karen remembers,

In 1976 I discovered Trammell reading his poetry at Old City Park across the street from my home at the historic (grundgy) Ambassador Hotel. I was his only audience and very impressed! I met his friends, Roxy and Judy Gordon at a bar in Dallas and started working for their graphics business. I'd just moved from Austin where I'd lived for 10 years and worked with various odd jobs, most notably Les Amis and the wildly disorganized-and-produced-on-a-shoestring, Austin Sun. (Minzer)

Roxy Gordon, in particular, was a truly interesting character that was a Choctaw / Assiniboine Beat poet. Gordon and his wife, Judy, started Wowapi Press in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and carried it with them to Dallas where they helped develop the Dallas scene in the 1980s and 1990s. Roxy Gordon had associated with many of the Beat poets and even wrote Beat poetry himself.

Karen Minzer has never lost touch with her Naropa roots and with the help of Robert Trammell and the Gordons helped start Wordspace, which has sponsored and promoted many Beat poets and writers. On the office walls of Wordspace the Beat connection is evident with pictures taken by Allen Ginsberg hanging all over. Minzer, although not an academic, like some of the other

Beats, has garnered respect as an organizer and Beat poet. Many of her skills as an organizer were learned from her attendance at the Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics and under the tutelage of Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman.

Stirring The Beat Pot: The Continuation Of Beatness Is Practice

There are many factors that have allowed the Beat to keep on going from creating a poetics that spoke for and from the underclasses of America, to capturing the sound of the current times, and finally to creating a community of artists. Each of these rhetorical elements may have helped foster and shape a Beat philosophy, but it is through the simple act of practice that has kept the Beat ideologies alive for over sixty years. The Beat Movement is merely the next name to the list of Beat titles from the Beat Generation to Beatniks to Hippies to Neo-Beats and to Post-Beats. The ideas that Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Joan Vollmer, Diane di Prima, Bob Kaufman introduced way back in the mid-20th Century have continued through the work of several people like Raúl Salinas, Karen Minzer, and Anne Waldman. Through the practice of their poetry, through their performances, and through the creation of Beat spaces the Beat philosophy continues. It is through the continuing practicing of writing, reading, and teaching new poets and new writers that keep the Beat the movement rolling on. From the Beat Generation to the Beat Movement, the Beat keeps on because the poets keep it going. The best way to keep the beat, Anne Waldman says is "Serve the art. Serve the community" (*Outrider* 77). As poets, writers, and scholars, the initiative for Beat writing is to be committed to the

process of creation, honestly, with an ear for the times, and then create a community that will continue that mission.

NOTES

¹ The name is actually spelled Joans, not Jones. The transcription misspelled Ted Joans' name.

² The actual year of the reading was 1955, not 1956.

³ I attained a copy of the 1930 Census from census.gov, which lists all of the family's names, ages, and father's occupation.

⁴ Barnard Registrar information.

⁵ Letter from Joan Vollmer to Edie Parker. Edie Parker Letters at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

⁶ Letter from Joan Vollmer to Allen Ginsberg dated 13 April 1949.

⁷ A *pachuco* is a Mexican American slang term for a young gangster or street gang kid from the 1930s, but now has come to mean a Mexican American criminal figure.

⁸ A colonia is a ruralized neighborhood, much like a barrio with usually only basic utilities, if that.

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